



OLD CALCUTTA; CAMEOS

—A series of clear-cut pictures of particular
aspects of Old Calcutta

**Dedicated to those who are
proud to call themselves
Citizens of Calcutta**

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1. FORT WILLIAM—1730
(As painted from an engraving by G. Vandergucht)
2. ST. JOHN'S CHURCH—1788 .
(From T. and W. Daniell's 'Coloured Views')
3. CALCUTTA FROM RIVER HOOGLY—1788
(From T. and W. Daniell's 'Coloured Views')

OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS

B. V. ROY, M. A

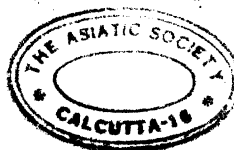
Late of the Corporation of Calcutta

Foreword by

AMAL HOME, EDITOR

Calcutta Municipal Gazette

[ILLUSTRATED]



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Author's Introduction

The story of Calcutta, from whichever side one looks at it, is a story of absorbing interest. Beginning, in 1692, as a cluster of tiny villages and mud-huts standing amidst marshy land, paddy-fields and jungles, in the course of two and a half centuries Calcutta has developed into a mighty city, giving asylum to more than four millions of people.

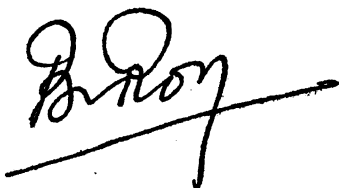
Notable writers and historians have delved deep into its early history, and written notable books on different phases and aspects of it. Dr. Busteed, in his *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, makes Philip Francis, Madame Grand and "Nuncumar" live again before our eyes, and act their parts on the stage of Calcutta; Charles Moore in his *Sheriffs of Calcutta* traces the chequered history of that functionary through the centuries; Archdean Hyde gives us an account of the "Parish of Bengal"; William Carey in his *Good old days of John Company*, H. E. A. Cotton in his *Calcutta: Old and New*, Harisadhan Mukherjee in his *Bengali Calcutta: Past and Present*, present us with an immense mass of facts and stories concerning Calcutta. A vast mine of information lies buried in Seton-karr's *Selections from the Calcutta Gazette* (1784 to 1823) and the tale is carried further forward by Brajendranath Banerjee in his *Sambad Patre Shekaler Katha*, *Selections from the Bengali Newspapers*, covering the period from 1818 to 1840. In fact, there is a large literature on the subject of Calcutta, but, alas, much of it is now out of print and in some cases, unobtainable.

I have drawn freely from the materials mentioned above, to gather together in one small volume a series of cameos, clearcut pictures of one or other particular aspect of Old Calcutta, and tried to string them together into one complete whole. I claim no credit for original research. I claim merely to have been a humble follower in the footsteps of the great writers of the past, to all of whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude for having made free use of their materials.

A few words of a personal nature relating to the genesis of this book may be permitted to me. I entered the service of the Corporation of Calcutta in 1909, and some years later, began to study the early history of Calcutta from such books as I could then obtain, my interest in the subject getting deeper and deeper as I advanced. The Corporation was remodelled under the new Act of 1923, and at the instance

of its first Mayor, Deshbandhu C. R. Das, a weekly journal, dealing with matters of civic interest was started under the name of the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* in November, 1924, under the able editorship of Mr. Amal Home. I made his acquaintance in 1927, and was encouraged by him to write a series of short articles on Old Calcutta for his journal, each dealing with a particular aspect, such as, prices of commodities, modes of travel, law and justice, etc. This was the beginning of a friendship and mutual esteem which has survived till today, and will survive "till death do us part"! Since 1927 I have been contributing articles on Old Calcutta to the *Gazette*, constantly heartened and helped by Mr. Home, whose magnificent collection of books on Calcutta, consisting of many rare and precious volumes, was placed freely and entirely at my disposal, thus placing me under a deep debt of gratitude to him. The full series of Seton-karr, *Selections*, an almost complete set of *Bengal : Past and Present*,—the well-known journal of the Calcutta Historical Society, and rare and unique volumes, like William Bolts' *Considerations on Indian Affairs*, published in 1772,—all these and many more I have placed under contribution for my purposes through the kindness of Mr. Home.

My earnest thanks are also due to my young friend, journalist and writer, Mr. Santosh Kumar Chatterjee, M. A., now a colleague of Mr. Home on the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*. His energy and enthusiasm, in taking over entire charge of the technical side of publication in the face of numerous difficulties and setbacks, were mainly responsible for this volume seeing the light of day.



6A, Maharaja Nanda Kumar Road
Calcutta
The 24th March, 1946

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FOREWORD

By

AMAL HOME

Editor, "Calcutta Municipal Gazette"

It is not easy to visualise Calcutta two hundred and fifty years ago. Many of us cannot imagine, I think, what this great city, with its more than there millions of people, rows upon rows of houses, and miles and miles of wide streets, looked like, when Job Charnock came here on his "mid-day halt" on the 24th August, 1690. King William III reigned in England, and Emperor Alamgir at Delhi.

Let us try to conjure up a picture of the three villages,—Sutanuti, Kali Kotta and Gobindapur,—which, at that time, occupied part of the site on which the Calcutta we live in now stands.

Set amid marsh and forest was the village Sutanuti on the River Hooghly, where Charnock landed at the head of his faithful band of followers,—a small number of Englishmen, servants of the Honourable Company of East India Merchants. Sutanuti was then a small but thriving village in which had settled a number of Bengali merchant-bankers and weavers, the Setts and the Basaks, who carried a good trade in cotton cloths and thread. The name Sutanuti is easy to explain. It is derived from the Bengali word *Suta*—cotton thread, and *nuti*—a hank or loop of yarn.

The site of Sutanuti is now occupied by the Northern portion of our city. As nearly as can be judged, Hatkhola covers the spot on which Charnock and his companions landed. The village extended from Chitpore in the North to Jora Bagan Ghat, a little below Nimtollah Ghat.

To the south of Sutanuti, lying back from the river, stood the Dihi Kali Kotta from which our city has earned its name, CALCUTTA. This village, extending from Nimtollah Ghat to Babu Ghat is now covered by the heart of the business quarter of the city,—Burrabazar, Clive Street and Dalhousie Square. Its southern boundary was a creek or *khal*, which originated from the marshes of the Salt Lakes, ran along the present Beliaghata Road, Creek Row (actually named after the Creek), Wellington Square, on to Hastings Street and so fell into the river,—its mouth extending from Koila Ghat to Chandpal Ghat. Large boats passed through this creek or canal carrying merchandise from inland.

The third village Gobindapur, like Sutanuti, also stood on the river, covering the site now occupied by Fort William, and ending at Adi Ganga, now known as Tolly's Nullah. All round this village, from the Creek to this Nullah, covering the whole of the Maidan, as we see it today, spread a great jungle intersected by numerous water-courses,—a desolate tract, haunted by wild beasts. Deadlier and more dreadful than the tigers and boars, serpents and crocodiles, were the roving bands of armed robbers.

They dashed out in swift little crafts, to attack and plunder rich cargo-boats as they lay at anchor on dark nights, or, turned inland, to fall on, in broad day light, and rob way-worn pilgrims, from all parts of the country, as they trudged along the road, on the western outskirts of the jungle, to the great shrine of Kali at Kalighat. This road is now the Chowringhee Road, named after "Cherangi", the presiding priest at a small but very ancient temple of Shiva, which stood on the bank of the Tolly's Nullah, a little above the Zeerut Bridge.

Such were the three villages and their surroundings when Charnock landed on the rain-swept banks of the River Hooghly and took up residence, once again, at Sutanuti. Three years ago, he had stayed there for the best part of a year, vainly trying to pacify the angry Nawab, who had turned him and his fellow-factors out of the town of Hooghly. It was there in 1592 that the English had been permitted to set up their first factory,—thanks to one of their countrymen,—Surgeon Gabriel Boughton. A naked lamp at Agra Fort had caught the gossamer veil of Shah Jahan's favourite daughter, Jahanara, and the person of the fair princess had been burnt extensively. Only the skill of the English physician could cure her and save her fair face from disfigurement; and a fond father and grateful Emperor opened the doors of trade in Bengal to the East India merchants from London.

To return to our story, however. The first thing

Charnock and his party set themselves to do was to construct some dwellings for themselves. The Minutes of the Proceedings of the "Bengal Council" or "Consultations", held at Sutanuti on the 28th August, 1690, record, with a touch of pomposity which raises a smile, the decision to build, "as cheap as possible..... with mudd walls and thatched, till we can get ground whereon to build a factory".

These mud-walled thatched huts formed the nucleus of the City of Calcutta as we know it today. Before his death in 1693 Charnock had acquired the *cutcherry*, the only conspicuous masonry building in the Settlement, which served as the estate office of the Mazumdars, the Bengali Zemindars of Calcutta. This building lodged the English Company's official staff and its records till 1706, when a house was built for the servants of the Company, the nucleus of the present "Writers' Buildings".

Round the personality of the "Father of Calcutta", Job Charnock, have gathered many an intriguing story. It is said that he rescued from the funeral pyre of a Brahmin his young widow about to become a *Suttee*, married her and had three daughters by her. The eldest of them was Mary, wife of Charles Eyre, who succeeded Charnock as the head of the English Settlement in Calcutta.

This romantic episode was found in an epitaph in verse on a tombstone of one Joseph Townshend, a "Pilot of the Ganges". It was discovered in St. John's churchyard in the sixties of the last Century,

near the place where Charnock himself sleeps undisturbed amid the dust and din of the town that he called into existence. The tombstone bore the date, 24th June, 1738,—more than forty years after Charnock had passed away. The story goes that this Brahmin wife of Charnock, later, turned Muslim, and Charnock “sacrificed every year a cock” on her grave !

In 1696 the English Company got permission from the Nawab to erect some fortifications, to defend themselves against Sobha Singh, the Hindu Chief of Midnapur, who had risen in rebellion against the Muslim rulers, seized the town of Hooghly and was about to advance upon Sutanuti. This was the beginning of Fort William, which, erected on the spot now occupied by the General Post Office, the Custom House and the East Indian Railway House, was completed in 1702. The entire construction stood on the River Hooghly, which flowed by where the present Strand Road runs.

The general appearance of the town in those days was squalid. Houses were mostly built of mud and straw surrounded by marshy pools ; lanes were narrow and muddy in the rains ; sanitary arrangements were conspicuous by their absence. Though the new settlers had cleared much jungle and built some masonry houses, yet, nearly seventy years after Charnock had finally settled at Sutanuti, only seventy houses were inhabited by Englishmen, mostly about the Fort. A contemporary writer thus

speaks of Calcutta :—"The native town consisted of thatched huts,—some composed of mud, and others of bamboo and mats,—all uncouth and mean ; the streets were dirty, narrow and crooked, while a pestilential swamp, close at hand, filled the air with sickly exhalations". Accidental and incendiary fires annually produced widespread devastation among them.

When Gervasse Bellamy, the Chaplain appointed by the Court of Directors in London for the English Settlement here, came to Calcutta in 1726, he found numerous large European buildings round "the Park," 'the green before the Fort',—which is now known as Dalhousie Square. North of the Park, and immediately fronting the Fort, stood the Presidency Church, which, in compliment to England's reigning Queen, was dedicated to St. Anne. It occupied the site where now stands the Rotunda of the Writers' Buildings. A furious cyclone in 1737 damaged the church beyond restoration.

From the east gate of the old Fort, passing the Church and forming the northern boundary of the Park, ran out the great eastern road,—now divided into Lall Bazar Street and Bowbazar Street, crossed at right angles, at a little distance, by three principal highways,—Chitpore Road, Bentinck Street (then called Cossaitola Gulee, or the butchers' lane) and Chowringhee Road, the immemorial pilgrim path to Kalighat.

, Somewhere up the Chowringhee, near, perhaps,

where now runs Middleton Street, lay the Company's garden that "furnished the English Governor's table with herbage and fruits and some fish ponds to serve his kitchen with good carp, *celkops* and mullet". The Governor had his official residence within the Fort and also a private house outside. Besides these there were the Council House, the officer's quarters at Writers' Buildings and the Hospital, which stood near Garstin Place. According to Captain Hamilton, who published in 1729 a most entertaining description of Calcutta at that period, many went into the hospital "to undergo the grievance of physic but few came out to give account of its operation".

With the triumph at Plassey and the power of ruling Bengal passing into the hands of the English Company with Mirzafar on the *musnud* of Murshidabad, Calcutta grew fast. A new fort was built at Gobindapur, the one that we know now. The town began to expand, and the European quarter to spread, freed from the necessity of nestling round the gunned turrets of Fort William in secured safety. At first, as was natural, new houses were built along the roads which already existed. The chief among these were the thoroughfares,—Lall Bazar, Bowbazar and the Chowringhee, from which they diverged into Dhurramtollah and Jaun Bazar. The wide spaces between these main road-lines were covered with villages, fields, tanks and water-courses, which, year by year and bit by bit, gave way before the advancing town till at last the only traces of the old order that

remained were to be found in the names of the different divisions and some streets of the town. Lall Bazar and Bowbazar Streets, it may seem strange now, were long a fashionable quarter. Many of the old houses, or whatever of them remain after the recent "operations" of the Improvement Trust, show, even in their squalor and decay, traces of their bygone splendour in their large and lofty rooms, beneath whose decorated ceilings in hooped skirts and powdered hair dainty damsels once tripped lightly in dance with gallant partners in lace ruffles and wigs, or passed through the tall doors and down the wide stairs to their sedan chairs or high-swinging chariots to be marshalled home through dark unlit streets by *mussalchis* with flaming torches.

The new Fort William was commenced in 1758 upon the lines traced by Clive and completed about 1773. Originally, the new Fort was planned to be erected at the crossing of Lall Bazar and Dalhousie Square and a canal brought from the River Hooghly, along what is now Dalhousie Square North, close to the Fort, with wharves and cranes. The canal, which was to absorb *Lall Dighi*, was to "furnish the town with water by having pipes of communication to large cisterns for that purpose in the Fort". Not even the wildest dreams of the Engineer and Captain of Artillery, who planned the scheme, could have visualised the busy wharves and jetties of modern Calcutta, the mighty cranes that embark and disembark goods from monster steamers, the miles

upon miles of "pipes underground" that, fed by huge overhead tanks, supply the requirements of the later metropolis of India. The site for the new Fort was afterwards fixed at where it now stands,—in the centre of what was then the flourishing village of Gobindapur, which was cleared of its inhabitants, the de-housed villagers being accommodated in other parts of the town,—notably, Taltollah, Coomartooly and Sobhabazar. In the last place Clive's infamous Munshee, Nubkissen, the clerk for conducting his Persian correspondence, was given a large tract of land, and these Indian quarters now rose rapidly in buildings and population.

A few words about some of the houses in Calcutta of those days may be of interest. The house, which Clive occupied on the recovery of Calcutta from Siraj-ud-daulah, and from which Clive Street takes its name, stood about the site of the present Royal Exchange,—somewhere in Lyons Range. The present Small Causes Court occupies the site of the Old Bankshall, or marine yard, which, before its use as a dock, was Governor Drakes' house. It, then, stood on the river bank.

The Government House, built after the Battle of Plassey, stood at the junction of Government Place East and the Esplanade, and faced the Esplanade which at that time ran continuously from Dhurrantollah Street to the river. Adjoining the Governor's House, to the West, stood the Council

House, the two buildings occupying the width of the present Government House grounds.

Where the Church of St. Andrews, or the Scotch Kirk, now stands at Dalhousie Square, stood the Mayor's Court, founded in 1727. The house was erected by Mr. Bouchier, a Calcutta marchant. In 1734 he gave it over to the Company on the condition of their supporting a Charity School for the Protestant boys, who were also lodged and fed there. And, here in the summer of 1775 was arraigned Nuncomar,—Maharaja Nandakumar,—on a charge of forgery and sent to the gallows by Impey and his brother judges. It was pulled down in 1792, and only its name remains commemorated in Old Court House Street.

Chowringhee was hardly popular those days. Even as late as 1768 only a few European country-houses stood there,—this part of the city being considered “out of town”; and *palkee*-bearers or sedan chair-carriers charged double fares for going to it, while at night; “servants returned from it in parties, having left their good clothes behind through fear of dacoits, which infested the outskirts of the Chowringhee.” There were once only two houses there,—one of which belonged to Sir Elijah Impey, the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court. This house is now occupied by the Loretto Convent in Middleton Row. The surrounding area was Impey's deer park, which stretched to the modern Chowringhee Road on the West and to Park Street, then known as the

“Burial Ground Road”, on the North. A guard of Sepoy used to patrol about the house and the grounds at night, occasionally firing off their muskets to keep off dacoits.

Holwell mentions Lall Bazer in 1736 as a “famous bazar.” In 1738 it was described as the best street in Calcutta, “full of little shabby-looking shops kept by black people”. In 1770 Europeans and others here “retailed Parish-arrack, to the great debauchery of the soldiers” In 1788 Sir William Jones referred to the nuisance here of low taverns, kept by the Italians, Spanish and the Portuguese.

Chitpore was noted for the temple of “Chittreswari Devi” where, legend has it, human sacrifices had not been rare before the British Government firmly established itself in Calcutta. Gobinda Ram Mitter, Holwell’s Deputy, known as the “Black Zamindar” of Calcutta, built here a big Navaratna temple, which the cyclone of 1737 destroyed. On Chitpore also stood the house and garden of Mahomed Reza Khan, to whom the entire administration of Bengal,—civil, criminal and financial,—was entrusted for several years, after the Company had obtained the *dewanee* of the province from the Moghul Emperor. It was to this house that the Nawab was brought as a prisoner in 1772, by the peremptory orders of the Court of Directors when it was suspected that he had made the interests of the Company subservient to his own. Reza Khan lived here in state till his death and came

to be known among the European residents as "Chitpore Nawab".

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These are, however, the mere outward aspects of Old Calcutta,—its topography and locations, its bricks and mortar. But my friend, Mr. B. V. Roy, the author of this monograph, has clothed it in flesh and blood. Through his cameos pulsates the life of its inhabitants in days gone by,—Calcutta at work and play. He takes us through almost every phase of Calcutta life at a time when the Englishman dressed himself up in a long coat reaching below the knees with large sleeves and cuffs, a vest made of gold brocade or blue satin embroidered with silver, breeches buckled tight at the knees, long stockings and shoes with silver buckles; when he wore long, pomaded and powdered hair; when Englishmen and even some Englishwomen smoked the *hookah* and an English *beau* with a graceful bow and flourish would flick open his gold bejewelled snuff-box and offer his friend a pinch of "prime Macouba"; when young gallants congregated before the church in numbers immediately after the arrival of a "Europe ship", bringing new faces and new beauties and any gentleman could meet a young lady at the entrance as she stepped down from her palanquin and taking her hand lead her to her seat; when one had to pay one gold *mohur*, exclusive of desserts and wine, to

dine at the "London Tavern" in Vansittart Row and the "Harmonic House" in Lall Bazar ; when slaves were being sold openly in Calcutta and rewards offered and advertised for runaways ; when huge blocks of ice, from the Wenham lakes in America transported to Calcutta in ships, used to be kept stored in a domed structure, called the Ice House in Bankshall Street ; when it was a general practice for Englishmen here to have "a Hindostanee Female Friend" and provide her with a complete and separate establishment ; when the Sheriff of Calcutta used to have an establishment of one hundred and ten servants to wait upon a family of four people ; when English residents in this city fought duels on every kind of pretext, mostly frivolous ; when a Bengalee *Banian* of an English firm would publicly notify his son's wedding in the *Government Gazette* fixing a couple of dates for the entertainment of his European guests and two for his Arab and Moghul guests, inviting them "to attend at his house at Simla to dine there and see the *nautches* and other entertainments provided" ; when a Bengalee banker would spend three lakhs of rupees on his mother's *Sradh* and the gifts bestowed on the Brahmins from Benares, Kashmir, Maharastra and Kananj included golden and silver utensils, elephants, boats and carriages ; when the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief would attend the Durga Puja festival at Sobhabazar Rajbati ; when a fairly large number of the riff-raff of the European countries,

who had drifted to this city, formed a menace to the peace and safety of its law-abiding citizens and it was very unsafe to cross the *maidan* after nightfall ; when the first Criminal Sessions of the Supreme Court (1795) tried a batch of five Europeans and one Bengalee on a charge of burglary and sentenced them to death ; when jurors were kept confined in the custody of the Sheriff and his constables during the entire proceedings of a trial ; when debtor-prisoners, imprisoned in Harinbari Jail, occupied good quarters, were waited upon by their own servants, obtained food and drink from the best hotels with drinks flowing in unlimited quantities, and brought even their own mistresses to relieve the monotony of their captivity ; when roomy, comfortable, gorgeously gilt, upholstered palanquins, covered with silks and satins, with poles partly mounted in silver, would convey people up and down the streets and lanes of this city ; when the Government of India had to remonstrate against the number of covenanted servants which greedy patronage in England sent out to India and a Member of the Supreme Council held the lease of two salt firms, which he sublet to two Armenirans on condition of an extra consideration to himself of a lakh and a quarter rupees ; when Englishmen here dined at two O'clock "in the very heat of the day, on soup, roast fowl, curry and rice, mutton pie, rice pudding, tarts, cheese, butter and excellent Madeira" ; when Lall Bazar, saw the birth of the first English

theatre in Calcutta and a Russian adventurer staged the first Bengali play near modern Ezra Street with Bengalee actors and actresses (1795).

Mr. Roy has waved his magic wand over all these, and I am here only to draw the curtain aside and let his readers gaze at the show provided for by him.

So up goes the curtain !

Amal Kumar

Central Municipal Buildings

CALCUTTA

The 29th March, 1946

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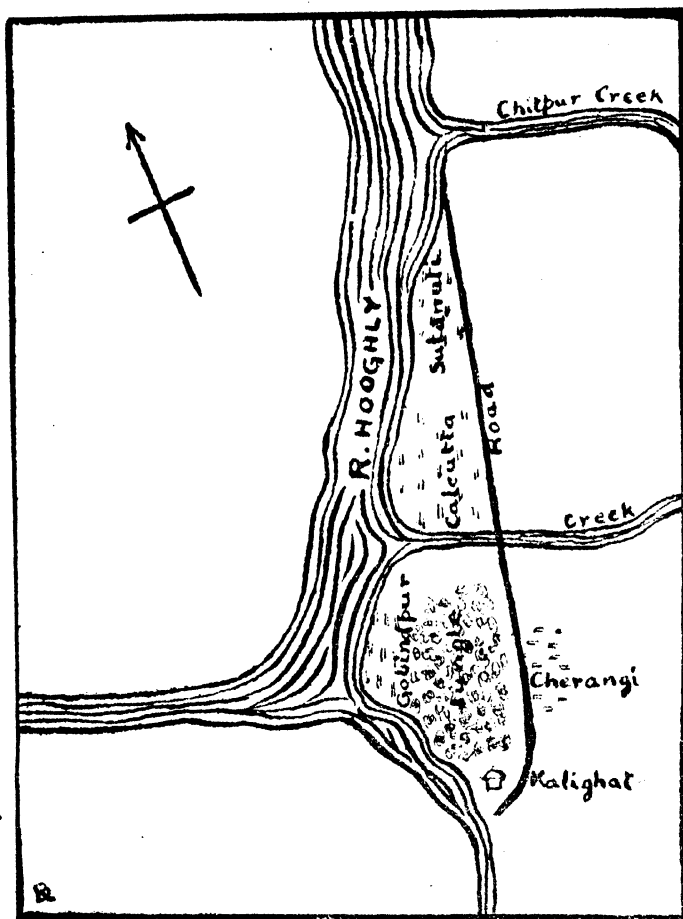
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OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT



Conjectural Map of Calcutta before English occupation

THE ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY OF TRADERS AND merchants established, among others, a Factory or Agency at Hooghly in the 17th Century, while similar establishments were set-up by the Danes at Serampore and the French at Chandernagore.

IN THE 17TH CENTURY

Between the years 1686 and 1690, the English were put to much trouble and tribulation by the unwelcome attentions of the *Fouzdar* (Governor) of Hooghly, named, Shaista Khan. Matters came to such a pass that they were forced to pack up bag and baggage and leave Hooghly under the leadership of their Factor, Job Charnock. The party moved down the river in boats until they came to the village of Sutanuti, described in a contemporary document as "a very small spot of rising ground on the east side of the river." Shaista Khan's minions pursued them even there, and they had to sail further down the river till they came to Hijli, near the mouth of the river. Here the small band of adventurers threw up hasty encampments and stayed for about three months, during which nearly half their number died of disease. Then, Shaista Khan having made overtures for peace, Charnock and his remaining men returned to Sutanuti, but did not stay there long. Charnock's appeals to the Directors of the Company had borne fruit, and Captain Hedges arrived with reinforcements. Charnock and his men were taken to Fort St. George (the modern Madras) which was at that time the most important post of the English in India. The next six months were spent in a fruitless cruise round the Bay of Bengal in search of a suitable site for a Factory in Bengal.

BIRTH OF CALCOTTA

In the meantime, a new Mogul Governor, named, Ibrahim Khan, had been appointed at Dacca, the then Capital of Bengal, who held out the olive branch to the English and offered them Rs. 60,000 by way of compensation for goods plundered and losses suffered. Then, for the third time, on the 24th August, 1690, Charnock returned to Sutanuti, which had already appeared to him a suitable site for a Factory, and prepared to settle there. All the former structures having been destroyed, new buildings—"with mud walls and thatched"—were put up in the midst of incessant rain, which compelled the men to live in boats on the river. In such circumstances was born the Town of Calcutta.

Subsequently, in 1698, the three villages of Sutanuti, Kalikota (from which the name of "Calcutta" is derived) and Govindapur lying along the east bank of the river, were leased by the English from the Zamindar Vidyadhar Roy (of the Savarna family of Barisa). The site of those three villages, which formed the nucleus of the present-day Calcutta lay, roughly speaking, from Baghbazar to Burrabazar, thence to the Eden Gardens, and from there upto Tolly's Nullah.

CHOWRINGHEE ROAD

In the above account there is no mention of Chowringhee but it was in existence at the time, being a small village, named Cherangi, several miles to the south of Sutanuti. It was a mere collection of huts and hovels standing amidst marshy stretches and paddy-fields, its inhabitants being poor fisherman, weavers, wood-cutters, etc. To the west of the village stretched a dense jungle (the present *Maidan*) infested with wild animals, including tigers. The water-logged fields were dotted with various kinds of wild fowl, and even

crocodiles were not rare. The Explanade of our day was a mere clearance amid the surrounding jungle, with a few hovels and patches of grazing or arable land.

"ROAD TO COLLEGOT"

The present Chowringhee Road had been in existence, as a road, long before the English settled at Sutanuti. It was a *Kutch*a road, being in fact a continuation of the Chitpur Road, and ran from Halisahar, 30 miles north of Calcutta to Barisa, about 6 miles south of the town, and was mainly used by pilgrims wending their way to the shrine at Kalighat. It was referred to in the contemporary English documents as the "road to Collegot", i.e. Kalighat. At that time the Kali Temple was situated much nearer Chowringhee, being removed to its present site later on, owing to the shifting of the course of the Ganges. So much can be gathered from tradition and from the early Bengali poems dating from the 15th and the 16th Centuries, such as, the "*Manasa-Mangal*", the "*Chandi*" of Kavikankan, and various other sources.

We shall now gradually move ahead and trace the changes occurring in respect of Chowringhee, from which we shall obtain a picture of the gradual development of the town as a whole.

IN THE 18TH CENTURY

In 1717, the English "purchased" 38 villages forming the nucleus of the present-day Calcutta proper, one of which was the village of "Cheranghy". The settlement of the English was developing rapidly, and by the middle of the 18th Century, the area around Loll Diggy, or the Great Tank, (Dalhousie Square) was built up with offices, go-downs as well as residential houses, and formed the centre of the town.

A Fort was also built to the west of the Tank, on the river-bank (at that time the river ran further to the east). Chowringhee at this period was a far-away place, where one or two country-houses had been built in and about the Park Street locality.

Then came the attack on Calcutta in 1756 by Siraj-uddowla's army. Calcutta was taken, the old Fort was practically destroyed and the English compelled to flee in boats and ships, sailing down the river to Fulta.

After the defeat of Siraj in the battle of Plassey in 1757, the English were rehabilitated in Calcutta, and their first concern was to select a suitable site for a new Fort, away from the residential quarters, the proximity of which had played such havoc with the old Fort.

FORT WILLIAM

The site chosen, on which the present Fort William stands, was beyond the village of Govindapur, and the entire area between this and the Esplanade was cleared of its dense jungle. The village itself was acquired and swept away, its inhabitants being compensated and removed mostly to the Sovabazar locality. The new Fort was begun in 1757 and completed in 1773. The entire jungle which had covered the space of the present *Maidan* being cleared away, the position of the Chowringhee Road was enormously improved, and a migration towards it commenced. By the end of the 18th Century there were about 20 garden-houses with large compounds and enclosed by high walls in the area, now described as "South of Park Street," this block of houses being called "Chowringhee" and the road known as the "road to Chowringhee".

OLD PARK STREET

Park Street was known at this time as "Burying Ground Road" from the cemetery standing at its eastern end. These localities were considered so remote and unsafe on account of robberies and acts of violence that we read of Sir Elijah Impey's garden-house and deer-park (from which the name Park Street is derived) being guarded at night by a squad of sepoy, and pedestrians never ventured there after dark unless in parties and well armed.

HISTORY OF CREEK ROW

Another factor which had operated to keep Chowringhee separate and cut-off from the English settlement or town proper in the Dalhousie Square area, was a broad creek which ran from the river eastwards to the salt marshes beyond Beliaghata. The creek was broad enough to be navigable by large boats and followed roughly the line of the present Hastings Street continued eastwards. It gradually dried up and was filled up and obliterated, but its memory is still preserved in the street, named Creek Row, which follows its original course. In William Baillie's Map of Calcutta (executed by Lt. Col. Mark Wood in 1784-85) the creek does not appear while we see the houses in "Chowringhee" clearly marked, and in Upjohn's Map of 1793, about 40 houses are shown in this locality. It may be mentioned here that the large tank at the western mouth of Park Street was dug in 1793 at the expense of Manohar Das, "the Great Benares Banker", and its dimensions are given in contemporary records as 350ft. in length and 225ft. in breadth.

THE BLACK TOWN

Upto to end of the 18th Century, the English Settlement was confined within the limits of the Chitpur Road on the

east. Burrabazar on the north and Explanade on the south. Beyond these limits was springing up the native or "Black town" which sprawled in a series of hamlets, houses, tanks and jungle in a haphazard fashion. Going forward into the early years of the 19th Century, even in 1824, we find Chowringhee still regarded as a suburb of Calcutta, and *palki* (palanquin) bearers charged double fares to go there.

THEATRE ROAD

The road was still a *kutch*a road devoid of all amenities. From the old records we find that in 1776 a sum of Rs. 125 was paid to a Mr. Fortnam, described as a "civil architect," for the purpose of making "one water-course in the Chowringhee Road," i.e. an open drain running along its length. Similarly, we learn that in 1818, the road was being watered from the corner of the Dharamtala Street upto the "Chowringhee Theatre" i.e. the present Theatre Road*. This operation was carried out by means of subscriptions raised among the residents of the locality. In the census report of the population of Calcutta about this time we find that "the lower or southern division of the town, which comprises Chowringhee, is but thinly populated, and the houses of the Europeans widely scattered."

IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Coming to the middle of the 19th Century, with the building of St. Paul's Cathedral in 1840 and its consecration in 1847, together with the removal of the Bishop's residence

* The Chowringhee Theatre was established in 1813 at the corner of the present Theatre Road, which is named after it. It was accidentally destroyed by fire in 1839. Sometime later, the site was purchased by Dwarkanath Tagore (the grand father of Poet Rabindranath) for a sum of Rs. 15,000.

to Chowringhee, rapid improvements were made in the locality. Trees were planted on the *Maidan* to beautify it, and in 1858 the first "footpath" in Calcutta was made by filling up the open drain running along the length of the Chowringhee Road.

INDIAN MUSEUM

From the mid-nineteenth Century records we obtain a picture of a long street of residential houses with large walled compounds, imposing gateways, and stabling accommodation for a number of horses. Durwans sat at the gates, watching the procession of pedestrians as well as palanquins and horse-drawn vehicles of various types passing by, bearing Europeans as well as Indians in an endless stream. It may be noted that there was not a single shop in the entire length of the road, all the houses being residential. There was only an untidy bazar at the corner of the Dharamtala Street, and the present Surendranath Banerjee Road (known earlier as the Corporation Street) was only an ill-kept lane. The Indian Museum building housed the old High School which was removed to Darjeeling in 1863, the Museum itself being established and opened to the public in 1875. The Bengal Secretariat offices were housed partly in another house in the Sudder Street.

"COMMERCIALISATION"

What may be called the "commercialisation" of Chowringhee began towards the end of the 19th century, and hardly any of the imposing shops, stores and similar buildings, which now fill this road, go back earlier than the "Nineties of that Century. The process of commercialisation went on during the last 40 or 50 years, and the solitary dwelling house standing on its own extensive grounds gave way to the

blocks of ugly barrack-like flats, clubs, business-houses, large 'department stores,' hotels, cinema-houses and shops, so that the entire face of the road was again changed.

HEALTH AND SANITATION

The conditions in the city of Calcutta as regards health and sanitation even till a hundred years ago, *i.e.*, upto the middle of the 19th Century, were, to put it mildly, simply appalling. Writers of the times have used much stronger epithets and more variegated adjectives in describing those conditions. One of them says :—

“One of the chief contributory factors of the high mortality among the Europeans was the insanitary condition of Calcutta, upon whose open cess-pools, filthy streets and contaminated drinking tanks, every visitor remarked with surprise and horror. The “putrid fever” and the flux were ever at hand, and the death-rate in the hot weather was so high that towards the end of October it was the general practice for those Europeans, who had survived the deadly season, to meet together and celebrate their deliverance by thanks giving banquets. Funerals were a daily occurrence despite the small numbers of the British colony”.

EARLY TOPOGRAPHY

In order to appreciate properly the conditions under which the people of Calcutta lived a century ago, we must know something of its topography and first beginnings. It is well-known that when Job Charnock and his small band of Englishmen first settled here in the 17th Century, and then obtained the lease of the three villages abutting on the river-bank,—Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kalikotta,—as the first nucleus of the town, the entire area now covered by Calcutta proper was marshy or swampy land with rank vegetation, scrub and patches of jungle, and a few comparatively higher

patches on which huts or habitations were built, and scattered patches of arable land. It was from such beginnings that a town, built up in a haphazard fashion, gradually grew up.

WHITE AND BLACK QUARTERS

The principal English "settlement" was centred in and around the "Loll Diggy" (modern Dalhousie Square) area, including business and residential quarters as well as a Fort. The main business thoroughfare was Cossaitolla Street (modern Bentinck Street) where there were shops, taverns, coffee-houses, livery stables, etc. The dense, "tiger-infested" jungle facing Chowringhee had been cleared away by the end of the 18th Century when the new Fort (the present Fort William) had been built and with the advent of the 19th Century, Chowringhee was becoming a favoured spot for residences of the Europeans.

As for the "Black Town", as the Indian portion was called, the most densely populated part was the area north of the Bowbazar Street upto the "Mutchooa Bazar Street" From this, upto the Bagbazar Canal, habitations were sparsely scattered and there were "extensive gardens, huge half-dried tanks and ruinous tenements." M^r. M. Farlan, Chief Magistrate of Calcutta, in the course of a report (1836) says :—

"The only broad streets in the native part of the town are the Amherst Street and the Central Road*, the former unfinished and neither of them considerable thoroughfares. The Chitpur Road is the great thoroughfare, but it is narrow, winding, dirty and encroached upon, while the cross-ways are all lanes very narrow, very filthy and bounded generally by deep open ditches."

* By the name Central Road is meant the long road which bears in different portions the names of Cornwallis Street, College Street, Wellington Street and Wellesley Street.

BHOWANIPUR

From another report regarding the southern suburbs, we get a description of Bhowanipur as :—

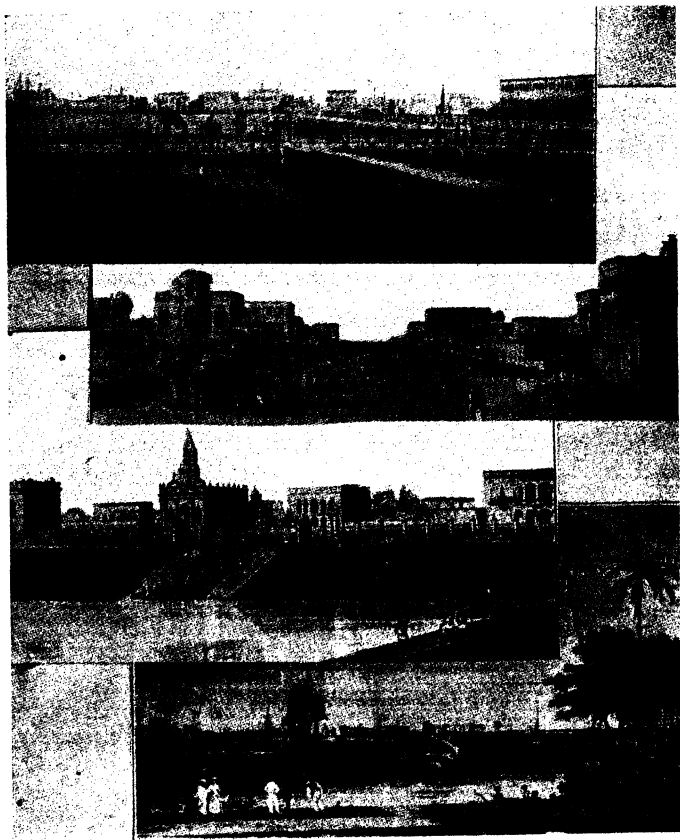
“the most densely populous of the native suburbs.....with low, closely built and ill-ventilated streets, great stagnant ditches lined with rank vegetation, a back-ground of extensive marsh and underwood, and innumerable half-dried tanks and pools”.

In fact at this period not only Bhowanipur but most parts of the town abounded in patches of jungle and rank vegetation, green and unwholesome tank and pools of water and numerous ruined houses choked up with over-grown jungle and filth.

So much for the general appearance and configuration of the town. I shall now describe the sanitary aspects as prevailing at the time.

WATER-SUPPLY.

A comprehensive survey of the town as regards the sources of water-supply was made at the instance of the “Fever Hospital Committee” about 1836-37, and it was found that “good tanks and clean, well-repaired wells are to be found in very few parts of the town”. The main source of supply, both for drinking and cooking purposes, was the river, except for those who lived at a distance from the river and had perforce to depend on the contaminated tanks and ill-repaired wells. The river-water was considered injurious to health from April to September, as it became brackish or saline until the rains set in, when it became turbid. Well-to-do people kept a store of large jars filled in February-March in their houses, while some even had river-water



1. A VIEW OF TANK SQUARE—1794
(From William Baillie's 'Twelve Views of Calcutta')
2. OLD COURT HOUSE STREET—1788
(From T. and W. Daniell's 'Coloured Views')
3. A VIEW OF THE GREAT TANK—1787
(From Thomas Daniell's 'Twelve Views of Calcutta')
4. CALCUTTA FROM THE GARDEN REACH
(By William Daniell, R. A.)

brought down in jars by boat from such places, as Santipur, Kalna, etc., up the river. The European residents in Calcutta fought shy of using the river-water principally because of the unwholesomeness caused by the number of dead bodies floating in it and the filth thrown in. The arrangements at this time for the cremation of the Hindu dead bodies were primitive and extremely limited, and the poorer classes generally disposed of their dead by throwing the bodies into the river. Bishop Heber in his *Journal*, dated 1822, mentions dead bodies floating by as he was proceeding up the river by boat. Mr. Strachey in his report as Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal, so late as March, 1864, stated that—

“more than 5,000 corpses have been thrown from Calcutta into the river, which supplies the greater part of its inhabitants with water for all domestic purposes, and which for several miles is covered as thickly with shipping as almost any river in the world. 1,500 corpses have actually been thrown into the river in one year from the Government Hospitals alone.”

“LOLL DIGGY”

The Europeans, therefore, mainly relied for their water-supply on the “Loll Diggy”, which was “crowded from 6 A. M. to 10 P. M.” by their bearers and servants, as well as others who sold the water. A *mussack* (skin-bag) of Lal-Dighi water, about 8 gallons, cost one pice. Europeans also used to collect and store rain-water in large Pegu jars for domestic use.

Besides the Lal-Dighi the only other tanks of any size from which people could obtain water were the Wellington Square, “Hadoo” (Cornwallis Square) and “Pudduldanga” (College Square) tanks. The poorer classes had

mainly to depend on the filthy, half-dried tanks with which the town abounded.

FIRST WATER-WORKS

In 1820, a small pumping plant was set up at Chandpal Ghat for lifting river-water into open masonry aqueducts, which distributed the water by gravitation over a small portion of the town (Old Court House Street, Dharamtala Street, Chowringhee, Park Street, etc.). People also took water from these aqueducts by dipping buckets into them.

In 1854 the system of aqueducts was extended to some other parts of the town, such as Wellington Street, College Street, etc., the cost being borne jointly by the public and the Government. The first Calcutta water-works for supplying filtered water were constructed about 1870, river-water being taken in at Pulta, filtered and conveyed through pipes to an underground reservoir at Tallah. Here, a pumping plant delivered the water partly to consumers and partly into another underground reservoir at Wellington Square, where another pumping plant repeated the process. MacCabe's scheme of an overhead reservoir at Tallah was taken in hand in 1909, completed and brought into use in 1911.

DRAINS

Upto the Seventies of the 19th Century, the only drains in Calcutta were deep open ditches running alongside the roads and always full of filth and stinking matter. An Englishman resident in Calcutta for over 40 years (John Phipps) says :—

“In many parts of the city and more especially in the most densely populated parts of it, the drains

—many of them merely irregular furrows in the soil without any brick-work—are continually left in a most filthy, uncleaned state, emitting the most noisome effluvia.”

Lieut. Abercrombie, who held office as Superintendent of Conservancy, gives a description (in 1836) of the abominable drains in the northern part of the city :—

They were unpaved, and the labours of the coolies in digging out in a haphazard manner the black mud and filth which obstructed their flow, merely succeeded in increasing the unevenness of their surfaces.....in some places the bottom of the drain was nearly 2ft. below its supposed out-let, so that the deposit of filth, consisting chiefly of the contents of privies and other matters in various stages of decomposition, gave out a most offensive stench when disturbed for removal.

The underground drainage scheme (Clark's Scheme) was approved and sanctioned by the Government only in 1859, and it took about 16 years to complete the main sewers alone.

CONSERVANCY

It was not until about 1820 that energetic steps were taken to have the roads properly metalled, surface drains improved and refuse removed regularly. I will quote again from Lieut. Abercrombie's report (1836) :—

“There are at present no effectual means in use for putting the streets into a proper state of cleanliness and preserving them in such. Dust, rubbish and all kinds of dirt are thrown into the streets *ad libitum* from every house, to be picked up as may be when the carts of the present very insufficient establishment* may happen to come round. The greater number of these carts are common native hackeries of the worst description, drawn by wretched, old bullocks, unfit for employment by the merchants, and are supplied by a contractor. The drivers are also obtained in the same manner, so that there is

no effectual control over them when they neglect their work or do it lazily. The coolies are also supplied in the same way. The probability is that half of them neglect their work in order to work for private employers, receiving pay both from them and the town."

PRIMITIVE ARRANGEMENTS

As regards removal of night-soil, the arrangements were still more primitive and objectionable, and are thus described by Mr. Goode in his admirable work, *Municipal Calcutta*,—

"The larger houses possessed private privies, while the poorer classes, who lived in huts, sometimes shared one privy between four or five huts, and sometimes resorted to the "mehtar-tatties," or public necessities, which instead of being municipal property, were built and managed by private enterprise, fees being charged for their use. A monthly fee of two to four annas, or a casual fee ranging from a few *cowries* to two pice were the usual charges. The night-soil, collected from private privies by mehtars, who were paid fees by the occupiers of the premises, was conveyed to depots called "tolla mehtars' depots", which were situated at convenient centres. It was then removed to the night-soil ghat on the river bank near the Mint, carried downstream in boats hired by the Municipality, on the contract system, and thrown into the river. This practice of throwing the night-soil into the river was not stopped until 1870, after which it was discharged at depots into the main sewers of the new drainage system."

It may be mentioned here that the connection of private house-drainage with the main sewers was not carried out until the eighties of the 19th Century. I will also make brief mention here of the arrangements for street light-

* There were at this time only 115 sullage carts belonging to the town, and about the same number supplied daily by a contractor, i.e. only about 300 carts to serve the whole town !

ing, which were practically non-existent upto the early years of the 19th Century,—a few oil-lamps then being put up here and there. Even in 1857, the number of such oil-lamps was only 313. It was in the same year that the first street-lamps lighted by gas were put into use.

DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD

I have already described above, how most of the Indian inhabitants of Calcutta conveniently and cheaply disposed of their dead by throwing the corpses into the river. As regards the Europeans, their original burying ground was in the site of St. John's Church. A new Cemetary was opened in 1767 at the eastern end of the Park Street, which then bore the name of "Burying Ground Road". Another was added shortly after in 1791. (These two are the North and South Park Street cemeteries.) The Council granted the chaplain, who conducted the burial service, an allowance for palanquin-bearers, on account of the long distance of the burying ground from the "Settlement," which, was then centred in and around "Tank Square." As regard the Mohamedans, they originally had a very large burying ground (nearly 40 *bighas*) at Kasiabagan, (occupying the land on either side of the Woodburn Park Road) which was closed in 1859. A new site in Tiljala was provided by the Corporation and opened in 1867. There were also other burial grounds at Maniktala, Ekbalpur and Bagmari.

EPIDEMIC DISEASES

With the prevailing conditions of sanitation, as described above, it is no wonder that diseases and death were rampant in Calcutta in those days. The death-rate among the Europeans, mostly from different kinds of fever, i.e.

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typhoid, enteric, dysentery, etc., was pretty high. As regards the Indians, we have it on evidence that they suffered mostly from fevers (bilious, intermittent or remittent), diarrhoea, dysentery, dyspepsia, rheumatism and venereal diseases, that nearly two-thirds of the Indian population had dyspepsia producing general debility, which pre-disposed to other diseases and that Hindoo children were generally weakly. An Indian physician of the time states definitely that "he does not see in the Town of Calcutta any children that are in perfect health," which is a pretty sweeping and damning indictment of the health of the town at the time.

FLOATING POPULATION

There was quite a large floating population in Calcutta at the time, and it is recorded that besides the multitude of the resident inhabitants, who were destitute of any organised form of medical aid except from a few dispensaries, people from various parts of Bengal came to Calcutta "to seek for employment, to beg charity and assistance from their friends and acquaintances, and for speculation." They came and lived with persons employed in offices, or workmen, or those who followed menial professions and whose means were every limited. If they were able or willing to live separately, they would hire lodgings in some hut or old building, where tiny apartments were let out from two annas to two rupees a month. These people did not possess sufficient clothing even, and having no beds, "had to lie down on mats or leaves spread on the damp ground in their cells and holes. In hot weather they slept out in open places or on the borders of the road exposed to all kinds of changes of weather." Consequently, mortality among these people was very large. There was a Police Hospital (established in 1779) to take in all

descriptions of paupers without distinction of caste or creed, mostly those found lying sick on the public roads. It is stated that before its establishment, it was nothing unusual to see in the morning human bodies lying on the streets mangled by jackals, or lying for days quite helpless and in a dying condition. We can, therefore, easily understand why heaps of corpses were then thrown into the river.

HOSPITAL ARRANGEMENTS

The arrangements for the treatment, both medical and surgical, of the sick were still practically in the embryonic stage. Besides the Pauper (Police) Hospital mentioned above, there was the Presidency "General Hospital" to which only (civilian) Europeans were admitted, and the adjoining "Regimental" Hospital for the European soldiers and sailors. There was a single "Native" Hospital, started about 1789, situated at Dharamtala, originally meant for surgical cases *i.e.* for the treatment of accidents and injuries, which was extended later to take in medical cases as well. It had two outlying "Dispensaries" for giving medical advice and medicines, one at Garanhatta and the other at Colinga (Park Street locality), both being in charge of English surgeons assisted by the native dressers, dispensers, etc.

FEVER HOSPITAL COMMITTEE

The surgeon in charge of the Garanhatta Dispensary, Dr. J. R. Martin, prepared and submitted a report to the Medical Council in 1835, urging the necessity of establishing a Fever Hospital in a central part of the town, and also submitted a valuable note on the medical topography of Calcutta based on personal enquiry and experience. This was the starting point, which led to the appointment, in 1836, of the

famous "Fever Hospital Committee", which was instrumental in inaugurating some of the most important improvements in the town. The Committee was in existence for 13 years, and produced a voluminous report which contains a mass of valuable information relating to Calcutta in the mid-19th Century period.

The final verdict of the Committee in a nutshell was that "a very large amount of diseases in Calcutta was caused by the absence of cleanliness, drainage and ventilation, and that the hospital accommodation of the city was most inadequate for its wants". Funds were there after being collected from the public and financial help was also rendered by the Government for the establishment of the Medical College Hospital, of which the foundation-stone was laid on the 30th September, 1848.

SOME NOTABLE INDIANS

The Fever Hospital Committee, besides consisting of about a dozen Europeans, included several notable Indians of that time. Of these notable Indians short biographical notes may thus be given :

RUSSOMOY DUTT

(1780-1854)—belonged to the well-known "Rambagan" Dutt family. Began life as a clerk on Rs. 16 a month under Hawke, Davis & Co. Their accounts had got hopelessly involved, and they offered a bonus of Rs. 10,000 to have them put in order. Russomoy Babu succeeded in doing the job and received the reward. Later he was appointed on Rs. 1,000 a month under Crutterder, Mackillop & Co. He also became a Commissioner (Judge) of the Small Causes Court, and was one of the first Indians appointed as Honorary Magistrates of in 1835.

PROSUNNO COOMAR TAGORE

(1801-1868)—lawyer, public man, author, was the first Indian to be appointed to the Viceroy's Legislative Council. He was the founder of the "Tagore Law Professorship" of the Calcutta University with a donation of three *lakhs* of rupees. One of his sons was Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore, and another, Ganendra Mohan, was the first Bengali Barrister (who embraced Christianity later).

RADHA KANTA DEB

(1784-1863)—only son of Gopi Mohan, the adopted son of Maharaja Naba Krishna, the founder of the Sovabazar Raj family, was a great patron of learning and culture, and one of the first "educated natives," well versed in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English. He was instrumental in founding the Hindu College, and the Bengali Encyclopoedia, "Sabda-Kalpa-druma", was published at his instance. A Justice of the Peace and Honorary Magistrate, he obtained the title of Raja Bahadur in 1836.

RAJ CHUNDR A DOSS

(1789-1836)—belonged to the well-known 'Marh' family of Jaunbazar. A philanthropist, he built several *ghats* on the river Ganges, notably the "Baboo Ghat". He was the husband of Rani Rashmoni, who built the great Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and appointed a young priest, named Gadadhar Chatterjee, to officiate there. This priest later became known all the world over as the Saint, Ramkrishna Paramhansa.

RUSTOMJEE COWASJEE

(1790-1852)—a Parsee merchant, and Honorary Magistrate, joined in all kinds of philanthropic activities. He was the founder of the Parsee Fire Temple at "Doomtolla" (present Ezra Street) built in 1840.

RAM COMUL SEIN

(1795-1844)—grandfather of the great religious reformer, Keshab Chandra Sen, was Dewan of the Bengal Bank. One of the first Indians appointed as Honorary Magistrates, he was intimately connected with many educational and philanthropic institutions.

DWARKA NATH TAGORE

(1794-1840)—grandfather of the world-famous poet, Rabindranath, was Dewan of the Salt Board and had many-sided social, political and philanthropic activities. He was a partner of Carr, Tagore & Co., a Director of the Union Bank; he purchased and became proprietor of two newspapers of the time, viz. the "Englishman" and the "India Gazette." He gave Rs. 3,000 for prizes to the successful students of the newly started Medical College, and repeated the gift for three successive years; also bore the entire expenses of sending and maintaining two Indian graduates of the Medical College to England for higher studies. He gave one *lakh* of rupees to the District Charitable Society. He purchased the extensive garden with villa, called "Belgachia House" and gave lavish entertainments there to his friends and also on occasions, to the Governor General, and other European ladies and gentlemen, dinner being generally followed by "nautches", fire-works, etc. King Edward VII, when he visited India as Prince of Wales in 1876, was entertained at this house by the Indian community of Calcutta. Dwarkanath was popularly known as "Prince Dwarkanath" for his lavish hospitality and open-handed generosity.

OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



THE ENGLISHMAN

AND

HIS SOCIETY



A Sketch of an Englishman
in Old Calcutta

THE ENGLISHMEN, WHO CAME TO CALCUTTA IN THE 17TH or 18th Centuries, whether as "writers" (clerks) in the service of the East India Company, as free merchants or in other capacities, were all exiles in a far-off land. Naturally, they brought their English manners, customs and institutions with them and tried to turn Calcutta into a second London as far as possible. At this period London had its coffee-houses, taverns and "assembly rooms", its drinking, card-playing and other forms of gambling, and so on, and if we look at Calcutta of those days, we find all these reproduced in the English Settlement and Society here.

COFFEE-HOUSES

The coffee-houses and taverns in Calcutta, as in London, were the recognised meeting-places and centres of gossip and exchange of news and were the precursors of the modern "Clubs". Mr. Carey, in his *Good Old Days of John Company*, says :—

"Those who can look back as far as 1814 will remember that the state of Society in England in those days was widely different from what it is now. Hard drinking was then so much the fashion that it was regarded as a sign of manhood to indulge in it. Foul language, gambling and duelling were considered as the accomplishments of a gentleman. When such was the opinion of society in England, no one will be astonished that the same fashion was followed in India and that a good deal of it survived as late as 1824."

Most of the taverns and coffee-houses in Calcutta were situated in the Lalbazar and Bentinck Street localities, the London Tavern in Vansittart Row and the Harmonic House,

in Lalbazar being well-known and much patronised resorts in the 18th Century.

For a rupee, a patron could have a dish of coffee, and was entitled, free of further charge, to the perusal of the newspapers, which were kept neatly arranged on a table. At the taverns dinners were provided to order only at a charge of one gold *Mohur* per head, exclusive of desserts and wine.

GAMBLING

As regards gambling, an English writer says :—

“That the practice of gambling has exercised a potent influence over the human race from time out of mind is an indisputable fact, but it may be fairly questioned whether it ever wielded such absolute sway in any country as it did in England during the 18th Century.”

Of course, the Englishman, who came out to India in those times, did not get rid of this “ruling passion” on the voyage out, and we find gambling as much prevalent in Calcutta as in London, mostly with card-games, such as ombre, quadrille and specially whist. High play was the fashion and fortunes were won and lost. Out of innumerable examples I will only mention that Philip Francis, a Member of Council, is said to have won from Barwell, another Member, the sum of £40,000 at cards.

HORSE-RACING

Horse-racing is another English form of gambling brought to this country. In the 18th Century races were run at Calcutta as well as at Baraset, and it is interesting to note that in Calcutta they were run in the early morning, starting before sunrise. It was not until 1818 that races began to be run in the afternoon.

MILITARY COLLEGE

Beside horse-racing, Baraset was notorious, in the days of the 18th Century for wild pranks, orgies and unholy revels of the Military Cadets, who were sent for training in the Military College established there. The bringing together of a large number of hot-headed English youths, first released from home influences and wholesome restraints, had a disastrous effect, and Baraset became notorious for "the daily row and riot of place," *viz.* gambling, duelling, jackal-baiting, firing at crows and kites, blowing of bugles and coach-horns and other "recreations" of a noisy and uproarious nature which formed "the pleasing pursuits and avocations of the young gentlemen at the Institution". Sometimes the pranks went beyond mere youthful and noisy exuberance of spirits, and we read of a Cadet being tried at the Criminal Sessions of the Supreme Court in January 1808, for "wilfully and maliciously setting on fire and burning a hut at Baraset, the property of Kennoo bearer, on the 24th day of October last." The Cadet was found guilty and sentenced to death, but the sentence was later commuted to transportation for life. It may be mentioned that the College was abolished in 1811.

SPORTS AND RECREATIONS

On the question of how the Englishman in Calcutta spent his time, what social duties he performed, what were his amusements,—no doubt his main occupation, or pre-occupation, was "shaking the Gold *Mohur* tree", and after amassing a fortune as quickly as possible, to return to his homeland. During his stay here, however, he performed within the restricted and rigid limits of the "English Settlement" social duties and functions, such as calls, balls, dances, dinners, etc.,

besides indulging in various kinds of amusements, sports and recreations.

OFFICE HOURS

Office-hours, we find from a notification 'in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 30th June, 1785, were fixed "from 9 O'clock to 1 in the afternoon and from 7 O'clock to 9 in the evening" during the hot and rainy seasons, *i.e.*, from 1st April to 30th September. During the rest of the year, the hours were "from 10 O'clock to 2 afternoon, and 7 to 9 evening. The hot midday period was devoted to dinner and the afternoon *siesta*, no one stirring out of door at this time. We learn from Mr. Fay's letters that the dinner-hour was at 2 O'clock "in the very heat of the day." Later, the dinner-hour was commonly between 7 and 8 p.m., practically as it is now, an additional hot meal, named "tiffin," being introduced at noon.

In the early morning hours, the gentlemen went riding on horseback, the ladies seldom. Children were also sent out at this hour "with their black nurses, in neat spring-hang carriages drawn by oxen." Every gentleman's child in this country had two or three servants, men or women. Babies had their wet nurses, for ladies in India never performed this maternal duty, the climate being their excuse.

ENGLISH WOMEN

Speaking of ladies, the proportion of English women in Calcutta was very small compared with the number of men, and the unmarried young women, who came out to Calcutta, came with the express purpose of "husband-hunting." The prize sought by the English damsels, who bore the long and arduous voyage and braved the perils and rigours of the

Indian climate, was "three hundred a year, dead or alive." That is, if she succeeded in marrying a member of the Civil Service, she secured an income of £300 a year so long as her husband was alive, and even if he died, a pension of the same amount. After their arrival, when the young ladies first went to the Church for Sunday service, it was permissible under "an ancient sanction" for any gentleman, without being introduced to her, to meet the lady at the entrance to the Church as she stepped down from her palanquin, and taking her hand, to lead her to her seat. The gallants congregated before the Church in large numbers immediately after the arrival of a "Europe ship" bringing new faces and new beauties, and it is said that "not seldom a choice for life had thus been made, the captivating new arrivals quickly becoming brides."

UNHOLY ALLIANCE

After these glimpses of the "bonds of holy matrimony," let us take a peep at the "unholy alliances" contracted by Englishmen in this country. The following advertisement appeared in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 16th, June 1809 :—

"To be sold by private sale, a garden house and grounds situated at Taltolah Bazar, which to any gentleman about to leave India, who may be solicitous to provide for an Hindostanee Female Friend, will be found a most desirable purchase", etc.

In this connection, "a young civilian in Bengal in 1805" writes :—

"It is a very general practice for Englishmen in India to entertain a *cara amica* of the country. This forms a complete and separate establishment, she dwells in a distinct but adjacent mansion, and has her own establishment of female servants, etc.

Like all other women of India, she seldom, or never, goes beyond the precincts of her own dwelling."

THE COURSE

The evening drive on the Course formed a regular part of daily routine of the English residents in Calcutta, both male and female. The Course was a carriage road running south from the Esplanade, and corresponded roughly to the present Race-course. Describing it, a writer (in 1813) says :—

"Here, in the cool of the evening, all the *beau monde* of Calcutta may daily be seen taking the air, and variety of equipages, dresses and complexions, from the elegant chariot or Landaulet to the covered cart ; from the blooming belle just arrived, to the tawny skin of the Indian, present to the stranger a spectacle singularly unique."

PUBLIC EVENINGS

At night, besides balls, dances, dinners, etc., there were "public evenings" held once a week by three or four Head Ladies of the Settlement. They were mere conversation parties, but were pleased "in as much you were able at one view to see and converse with all the beauty and fashion of the Settlement." The company generally assembled by about 10 or 11 O'clock, lounged, talked, walked about for two hours or so, after which they sat down to a cold supper and then went home.

CRAZE FOR DANCING

Dancing was a form of amusement much favoured by both the sexes, and in spite of the climate, the English settlers in Calcutta indulged in it to a very large extent. Balls and masquerades were sometimes held in private houses,

but more frequently "assemblies" got up by subscription were held in halls capable of accommodating a fairly large number of people, such as the London Tavern in Vansittart Row, etc. It is said that Minuets and country dances were much in favour.' There are many caustic comments by the contemporary writers on this craze for dancing. One writer says :—

"The grand amusement in the cold season for both the sexes is dancing ; this may be considered the staple article in the (Calcutta) market of pleasureThe Ladies are fond of it to excess, and I believe would willingly continue it all the year round if the gentlemen were as agreeable.....As it is, I have seen them dancing on "feverish nights" when the pearly drops have trickled down their necks in showery profusion, notwithstanding the aid of Punkahs, etc. This is amusement !!"

It is said that many English women in Calcutta died of consumption brought on by the excessive physical strain of dancing through the night. Another form of amusement, *viz.* the Theatre, was started in Calcutta about the middle of the 18th Century, the first English "Play-house" being established "a few years before 1756". That, however, is another story.

PLEASURE-BOATS

Pleasure-boats, for excursions on the river to enjoy the cool breeze of the evening, were much in vogue. These boats were generally of two kinds, *viz.*, the roomy *budgerow* and the *mourpunkhy*, or Snake-boat. The latter were long narrow affairs, not more than 8ft. in breadth and often upwards of 100ft. in length, "They were paddled by 30 or 40 men and steered by a large paddle from the stern, which

was either in the shape of a snake, peacock or some other animal. In one part of the stern was a canopy supported by pillars, under which sat the owner and his friends." They were often gaily or richly decorated, and sometimes accommodated bands of musicians to discourse sweet music.

ICE HOUSE

The problem of obtaining cool air as well as cool water during the hot months was a serious one. Every English household had an *ab-dar* among its staff of servants. His duty consisted in cooling a *sorai* (earthen jar) of water by moving it to and fro in a large receptacle containing saltpetre and water, so that the water in the *sorai* became almost as cold as ice.

It may be mentioned here that the first essay at supplying the residents of Calcutta with ice was made by some enterprising merchants who procured huge blocks of ice from the Wenham Lakes in America and transported it to Calcutta in ships. The ice was kept stored in a domed structure, called the Ice House, in Bankshall Street. The establishment of plants for manufacturing ice came much later. It may also be mentioned that in Indian households, well-to-do people kept water stored in large earthen jars in cool basement rooms, sometimes buried upto the neck in earthen floors, thus cooling the water.

SNUFF-BOX AND HOOKAH

The habit of snuff-taking was fashionable in English Society and just as in our days one would offer a cigarette from one's case, the *beau*, or fop, of those days would, with a graceful bow and a flourish, flick open his gold snuff-box.

(often jewelled and worth a fortune) and offer a pinch of "prime Macouba".

As regards tobacco-smoking, pipes and cigars were available in very limited quantities, so that most Englishmen (and even English women) of those days adopted the Indian *hookah*. We read that "when he (the Englishman) had finished his morning tea, his *hookah-burdar* softly slips the upper end of the snake or tube of the *hookah* into his hand.

THE HOOKAH-BURDAR

"The *hookah-burdar* not only tended the gentlemen's *hookahs* at home, kept the silver chains and rosettes brightly polished, blew on the charcoal and renewed the rose-water, but accompanied his master abroad, even to dinners at the Government House, at which, after the ladies had withdrawn, the *hookah*-bearers entered in a solemn procession, each taking up his position near his master, to whom he handed the ivory mouthpiece after unwinding the enormous coil of piping from round the neck of the *hookah*. It was important to arrange the *hookahs* properly, for it was considered an insult to step over another's *hookah*-snake.

"Many ladies began to favour the *hookah*. At receptions, the ladies sat in carefully posed attitudes, with the coils of the *hookah* encircling their waists like Cretan snake-goddesses and it was a very flattering gesture for a lady to offer a gentleman the mouth-piece of her *hookah* for a refreshing puff."

AN ENGLISHMAN'S ATTIRE

I will conclude this chapter by describing the dress of the Englishman at this period. It generally consisted of

"a large, bushy wig tied at the ends," a long coat reaching below the knees, with large sleeves and cuffs, a finely embroidered vest, breeches buckled tight at the knees, long stockings, and shoes decorated with buckles. The men at this period were very partial to bright colours as well as a profusion of laces and embroideries in their dress. For example, vests or waistcoats were made of gold brocade, or blue satin embroidered with silver, or were sprigged and flowered, costing two to three hundred rupees each.

HAIR-DRESSING

The hair was generally worn long, pomaded and powdered, and tied into a queue behind ; or, a wig was worn, specially for ceremonial occasions. The hair-dresser was, therefore, indispensable in those days for gentlemen as well as ladies. Among the household staff a wig-barber, a shaving barber and a hair dresser were always to be found, the pay of a "native" hair dresser ranging from two rupees a month upwards. We find mention of two Frenchmen settled in Calcutta as special hair-dressers. One of them, M. Malvaist, charged two gold *mohurs* monthly for dressing ladies' hair ; the other, M. Sivet charged eight rupees to ladies for one hair-cutting and four rupees for hair-dressing, while half these sums were charged for gentlemen.

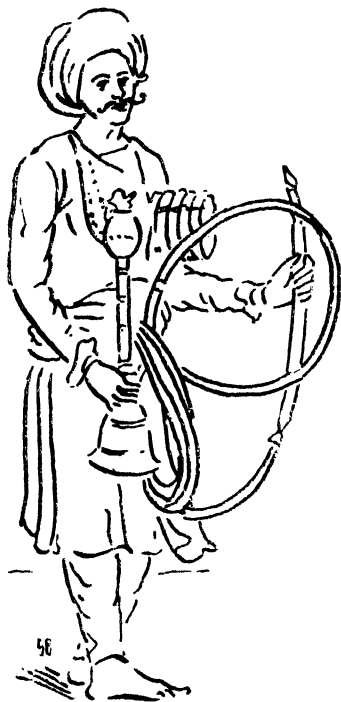
OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



THE ENGLISHMAN

AND

HIS HOUSEHOLD



HUKABARDAR, or the bearer of the *hookah* (smoking appliance) was an important native attendant of an Englishman, at home and in society in Old Calcutta.

IN CALCUTTA OF THE 18TH CENTURY, IN ENGLISH households the problem was not a paucity of servants, but the other way about. Householders were burdened with too many servants, none of whom could be spared, and the wages-bill every month mounted up to a high figure. In the course of a letter written to a friend, Macrabié (the brother-in-law and Secretary of Philip Francis, who later became Sheriff of Calcutta and earned immortality as the officer charged with the execution of Maharaja Nanda Kumar.) writes : "Oh, monstrous ! a hundred and ten servants to wait upon a family of four people ! Tell me if this land does not want weeding ?" This was surely an extreme case, but 30, 40 or more servants in a single household were not uncommon. The difficulty was that no servant would do anything beyond the particular duties attached to his job, the demarcations between their duties and functions being sharply defined.

NUMBER OF SERVANTS

From the published *Diary* of Mrs. Sherwood, which had been kept during her 10 years' residence in India (1805 to 1815), the following extract will be illuminating :—

"One *kitmulgar* at nine rupees a month ; this functionary goes to market, overlooks the cook and waits at table, but he will not carry home what he purchases in the market ; one *mussalohee*, his business is to wash dishes, carry a lantern and in fact to wait upon the *kitmulgar*. One *bheesty*, his name signifies the Heavenly, and he carries water in a skin over his shoulder. We can understand wherefore, in such a climate as India, he may have got his name ! One *matrahee*, the only female servant we had ; she swept our rooms and appeared several times a day to receive my order. She wore a chintz or

silver petticoat, a white muslin jacket and a veil, and a quantity of silver ornaments. One *sirdar*, bearer, or Prince of the bearers. One mate. When we had provided ourselves with a palanquin, we had also to have six bearers. One washerwoman, or *dhobie*, whose wages are seven rupees a month. One cook or *bouverchie*."

MONTHLY WAGES

It is worthy of mention that in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 31st March, 1785, appeared an appeal from the employees of the East India Company to their Board of Directors at London requesting that "the extravagant wages exacted by our domestics" might be taken into consideration and some form of relief granted by fixing the rates. In this appeal "the present monthly wages" in Calcutta were given as follows :—

| | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------------|-----|-----|--------------|
| 1. | <i>Consumah</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 10 to 25 |
| 2. | <i>Chobdar</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 8 |
| 3. | Head Cook | ... | ... | Rs. 15 to 30 |
| 4. | Cook's mate | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 12 |
| 5. | Coachman | ... | .. | Rs. 16 to 20 |
| 6. | <i>Jemadar</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 8 to 15 |
| 7. | <i>Khitmutgar</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 10 |
| 8. | Head Bearer | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 10 |
| 9. | Bearer | ... | ... | Rs. 4 |
| 10. | Peon | ... | ... | Rs. 4 to 6 |
| 11. | Washerman to a family | ... | ... | Rs. 15 to 20 |
| 12. | „ to a single gentleman | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 8 |
| 13. | <i>Syce</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 8 |
| 14. | Grass-cutter | ... | ... | Rs. 5 to 6 |
| 15. | <i>Mushalchee</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 4 |
| 16. | Barber | ... | ... | Rs. 2 to 4 |
| 17. | Hair-dresser | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 16 |
| 18. | <i>Khurtchburdar</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 6 to 16 |
| 19. | <i>Metranee</i> | ... | ... | Rs. 4 to 6 |
| 20. | Wet Nurse | | | |
| | (besides clothes, etc.) | ... | ... | Rs. 12 to 16 |
| 21. | <i>Aya</i> (besides clothes, etc.) | ... | ... | Rs. 12 to 19 |

RESPECTIVE DUTIES

The above list probably represents the minimum number of servants required for a "respectable" household, and it is necessary to elucidate the duties of some of them for the modern reader. *Consumah* is of course the *khansama* who waits at table; *khurich-burdar*, literally meaning the "keeper of the purse," would correspond to the steward or house-keeper of the present day, who would disburse the money required for the daily household expenses; *mushal-chee* means a cook's assistant, who would grind the "*mussalas*" (spices) but at that time he had another function to perform, *viz.*, to carry the *mushal*, or lighted torch, before his master when he went out in the evening. It must be remembered that at this period there was no street lighting in Calcutta. In fact, the first sporadic attempts at lighting the streets were not made until the twenties of the 19th Century. Even so lately as 1836, there were only a few oil-lamps (numbering only 313) set at long distances apart, and it was not until 1859 that the first gas-lamps appeared on the streets of Calcutta.

SLAVES IN CALCUTTA

Coming now to slaves in Calcutta, the modern reader may hold up his hands in horror at their very idea, but it is a historical fact that slavery was an established institution in India from the earliest days of the Hindu and the Moslem rule, and so far as Calcutta is concerned, it persisted upto the middle of the last Century.

In ancient times slaves were of different categories: they might be prisoners of war, or might be purchased for a price; or born of parents already in slavery, or might have sold themselves to creditors, in liquidation of debts, or might

form part of a wedding dowry, etc. In general, it may be stated that under both the Hindu and the Moslem rule, slaves were treated humanely.

TRADE IN SLAVES

Concerning slavery as it flourished in Calcutta in the 18th Century (and later) we find that, while a good many slaves were the children of parents who sold them owing to their inability to support them, other fruitful sources from which the number of slaves increased were the depredations of the Portuguese and the *Mughls* of Arakan. These bandits and pirates made frequent raids into Bengal's coastal villages and took away able-bodied men, women and children to be sold as slaves. It is recorded in the *East India Chronicle* for 1758 that :—

“In February, 1717, the *Mughls* carried off from the most southern parts of Bengal 1,800 men, women and children, and in ten days they arrived in Arakan, and were conducted before the sovereign, who chose the handicrafts-men, about one-fourth of the number, as his slaves. The remainder were returned to their captors, with ropes about their necks, to market, and sold, according to their strength, from 20 to 70 rupees each.”

A SALE ADVERTISEMENT

As regards slaves being sold openly in Calcutta, on reference to the pages of the *Calcutta Gazette* we frequently find advertisements offering slaves for sale, or offering rewards for capture of run-away slaves, etc. Sir William Jones, Chief Judge of the Supreme Court, in the course of a statement made in 1785, says :—

“Hardly a man or woman exists in a corner of this populous town, who hath not at least one slave-child, either purchased at a trifling price or saved

for a life that seldom fails to be miserable. Many of you, I presume, have seen large boats filled with such children coming down the river for open sale in Calcutta."

CASES OF MALTREATMENT

It is, unfortunately, pretty evident from contemporary records that slaves were not infrequently treated with the utmost harshness and even cruelty by their masters (and mistresses). Stories of gross cruelty to slaves were many, and there is on record a case of fatal maltreatment accorded to Nasibun, a slave-girl, by her mistress, Maria Davis, in 1828. The following extract is taken from the *Bengal Chronicle* for 1831 :—

"That slavery exists in Calcutta is a fact too notorious to be denied. I am led to this remark from a thorough knowledge of its actual existence, as also from being a frequent eye-witness of the extreme cruelty practised towards the generality of that neglected class.....Slaves of both sexes are generally purchased from the indigent Hindu or Hindustanee mothers ; a young girl will bring, according to her age and usefulness, from Rs. 19 upto Rs. 100."

This unsavoury aspect of Calcutta life, the reader will be surprised to learn, continued till the middle of the 19th Century, *i.e.*, upto a hundred years ago. The British Government by an Act passed in 1831 emancipated all slaves of the Crown. Here in India, during the administration of Earl Grey, an Act was passed in 1833 formally abolishing slavery to take effect from the 1st August, 1845, or just a hundred years ago.

The Marhatta Ditch

A Vanishing Feature Of Old Calcutta

The invasion of the Marhatta raiders, commonly known as *Bargis*, into Bengal began since the early part of 1742. The Council of the East India Company in England proposed to plant batteries at all the main roads and approaches, but the only measure adopted for the protection of the native population was to plant a battery of 6 guns at "Seat's (Sett's) Garden", in the modern Jorabagan locality.

In November, 1742 a military expert, Theodore Forrestie, gave proposal for the defence of the town but his scheme was found to be so extensive and so costly that nothing was done.

The sudden appearance of the Marhatta raiders near Tannah Fort on the west bank of the Hooghly (near the modern Botanical Gardens) towards the end of 1742 caused a great panic among the inhabitants of Calcutta, who proposed, at their own expense, "to dig a ditch 42 yards wide" from the Company's battery at the prison (*i. e.*, near the modern Hastings locality) round to Perrin's Garden at Baghbazar. The Company advanced Rs. 25,000 for this, and the result was the Marhatta Ditch, a wide ditch running in a semi-circle all round Calcutta along the north, east and south. The south portion was, however, not completed and ended somewhere beyond the bend of the present Lower Circular Road where Ballygunge Store Road meets it.

OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



DUELLING—

AN

AFFAIR of HONOUR



A scene of duel in 19th Century
Calcutta

SINCE THE ERA OF MANKIND, PERSONAL COMBATS between man and man have taken place for a variety of reasons, such as, for the possession of property or of a woman, and for disputes and quarrels arising about a thousand different matters. In Europe, in the Middle Ages, chivalrous knights went forth to perform deeds of derring-do and challenged other knights to mortal combat with sword, spear, mace or other weapons of the age. They fought for the glorification of their country, their king, their lady-love or for upholding their own name and fame.

18TH CENTURY ENGLAND

The duels fought in 18th Century England (and Calcutta), however, stand in a separate category and may be termed a degenerate survival from the days of chivalrous knighthood, being fought on account of the most trumpery or frivolous pretexts or causes. An argument in a friend's house or at a public place, a disagreement or difference of opinion on questions of politics, philosophy, current affairs,—in fact, any and every kind of pretext, flimsy or cogent, led to challenges, followed by duels and bloody death. The English residents of Calcutta in the 18th Century brought this pernicious custom with them from their homeland, and duels were of frequent occurrence among them in Calcutta up to the end of the 18th Century, resulting either in death or serious disablement for one or other of the parties.

The pages of the *Calcutta Gazette* furnish many instances, and one of the most famous duels fought in Old Calcutta was

that between the then Governor-General, Warren Hastings, and the First Member of the Council, Philip Francis, on the 17th August, 1780, which I shall presently describe in detail.

RULES OF DUELS

In order to appreciate properly the accounts of duels which took place in Old Calcutta, the reader should have an idea of the state of things in England at that period, being the background on which the picture of Calcutta duels should be painted. It is also necessary for the reader to know something about the rules and observances which punctiliously governed the fighting of duels.

When a gentleman felt himself affronted or his "personal honour" affected by any fact, deed, or word of another person, he challenged the latter to give him "personal satisfaction", as it was called, *i. e.*, to fight a duel. Challenges were conveyed by word of mouth but more generally by means of letters. The challenged person had the choice of weapons, not the challenger, and either swords, or pistols, or even sometimes both, were the weapons used. Each party chose a "second" to accompany him to the spot selected for the combat, which was generally a quiet and secluded spot away from the crowded places.

The early morning was the time generally chosen for duels, and a well-known saying in this connection is "pistols for two and breakfast for one", *i. e.*, when the combatants left the hotel in the early morning hours to go to the selected spot, the order to the landlord was so worded, meaning that two would go out but only one would return to have breakfast.

HOW HONOUR WAS SATISFIED

On reaching the spot selected, the swords would be measured as they must be of the same length, or if pistols were used, they would be loaded by the seconds, and the distance between the two combatants carefully measured out. The pistols were to be fired together at the drop of a handkerchief, or by one of the seconds calling out "one, two, three." In most cases, a surgeon also accompanied the party, and generally speaking, honour was deemed to be satisfied if one or the other of the duellists was wounded, if not killed.

PREVALENCE OF DUELLING

About the prevalence of the custom of duelling in England, I will quote from an authoritative work, *England and the English in the 18th Century* by W. C. Sydney, who says :—

"Duelling was very prevalent in English life in the 18th Century, and the reasons are not far to seek. In the first place, the fact must be taken into account that the condition of the London thoroughfares was so disgraceful until the latter end of the Century that it rendered all attempts on the part of the poor, feeble, old watchmen to prevent and quell the daily, nay hourly, disturbances of the public peace, inefficacious. In the second place, the strife and rancour of political feeling, the brawls and squabbles of coffee-houses and taverns, love affairs, and beyond everything else, the universal mania for gambling, tended to produce quarrels and irritation; and at a time when the canons of fashion declared swords to be indispensable articles of male attire, it can hardly be wondered at that duels were of such frequent occurrence as they were. Mrs. Delany (the friend of George III) has recorded that the practice of duelling was the reigning curse of the age in which she lived. She was perfectly justified in so saying. The ball-

room, the masquerade, the open streets, the public walks, the coffee-houses, the pits of the Theatres, were the scenes of quarrels which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, ended in duels, and scarcely a week passed without one human being at least being immolated on the altar of worldly honour. Actuated by notions of pride, utterly false, men considered it beneath their dignity either to acknowledge, apologise, or retract, and held that all shortcomings should be atoned for either at the point of the sword or the mouth of the pistol. The prevalent idea even among the most orthodox people at this time seems to have been that some knowledge of the art of "crossing swords" was absolutely essential to all who wished to be included in the category of fine gentlemen. The passion for duelling, like that for gambling, was not, however, confined to any one class or rank. It pervaded all without exception."

JUSTIFICATION FOR DUELS.

We find that such an eminent person as Dr. Johnson defended the custom of duelling on the ground that "its barbarous violence was more justifiable than war, in which thousands went forth, without any cause of personal quarrel, to massacre each other."

One of the most sensational duels fought in England in the 18th Century was that between the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun, about which a writer remarks: "Both being harried by false points of honour, fatally went out and fought with so violent an animosity.....that Lord Mohun was killed outright, and the Duke of Hamilton died a few minutes after." Again, in May, 1772, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the famous playwright, fought two duels with Captain Mathews on account of Miss Linley, a celebrated singer of the day. At the first, Sheridan was much wounded. "Both their swords breaking upon the first lunge they threw each



- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Richard Barwell | 2. Sir Elijah Impey |
| 3. General Clavering | 4. Warren Hastings |

other down, and with the broken-pieces hacked at each other rolling upon the ground, the seconds standing by, as quiet spectators." In another case, we read that in consequence of disagreement about certain expressions uttered during the progress of a debate in the House of Commons, Charles James Fox fought a duel with Mr. Adam on the 29th November, 1779, receiving a slight wound. (This duel is specially worthy of note, because the distance between the combatants in the Hastings-Francis duel in Calcutta was fixed in reference to this, as we shall see presently.)

FRIVOLOUS PRETEXTS

In a case reported in the *Westminster Journal*, 1735, the cause of the quarrel was so frivolous that the modern reader may find it hard to believe that men could be so foolish as to risk their lives on such pretexts. Two men of the working class (lace-weavers) while in a tavern, quarrelled as to the proper method of cooking a dish of sprats (a kind of small fish),—whether the fish should be fried or boiled ! They challenged each other to a duel, and a sum of three shillings was raised "with the assistance of some friends to procure the use of pistols", after which the duel was fought. Fortunately, neither of the duellists was killed or even wounded.

THE LAST IN ENGLAND

The last duel on English soil, of which any record remains, was fought in May, 1798, between the Rt. Hon. Mr. William Pitt, M. P. and Mr. George Tierney, M.P. The quarrel arose over a debate in the House of Commons, in which certain expressions used by Pitt were taken exception to by Tierney, who the next day sent Pitt a challenge. Having discharged their pistols, honour was deemed to be satisfied, and they were reconciled.

SOME CALCUTTA DUELS

I will now come to Calcutta and first quote some items from the *Calcutta Gazette* relating to duels fought here :—

29th July, 1784—"Died on Saturday morning Lieut. White of an wound which he unfortunately received in a duel the preceding evening."

31st May, 1787—"Yesterday morning a duel was fought between Mr. G., an attorney-at-law, and Mr. A, one of the proprietors of the Library, in which the former was killed on the spot. We understand the quarrel originated about a gambling debt."

5th July, 1787—"On Monday last came on the trial of Mr. A. for killing Mr. G. in a duel. The trial lasted till near five o'clock in the afternoon, when the Jury retired for a short time and brought in the verdict, 'not guilty'."

With reference to this 'trial' it may be mentioned that legally duelling was forbidden and if anyone was killed, the killer was liable to be charged with 'man-slaughter' but was generally let off with a fine of a few pounds (or rupees).

HASTINGS AND FRANCIS

I will now describe the famous duel which took place between Hastings and Francis. That garrulous lady, Mrs. Fay, whose letters written from Calcutta are a mine of information regarding contemporary affairs, records the duel thus in a letter, dated the 27th September, 1780, *i. e.*, just over a month after the event :—

"I must relate what has occupied a great deal of attention for some days past—no less than a duel between the Governor-General and the First-in-Council, Mr. Francis. There were two shots fired, and the Governor's second fire took place. He immediately ran up to his antagonist and expressed

his sorrow for what had happened, which, I dare say, was sincere, for he is said to be a very amiable man. Happily the ball was soon extricated, and if he escape fever, there is no doubt of his speedy recovery.....What a shocking custom is that of duelling! It always vexes me to hear of such thingsMr Francis is highly respected here, and being now at the head of what is called the Opposition Party, his death would be severely felt by many who affect great indifference about the event."

THE CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

The quarrel, it is stated, originated from a violent difference of opinion in certain matters of State-policy at the Council, and the Governor-General had written a furious letter to Francis, whose reply concluded with the following words :—

"But you must be sensible, Sir, that no answer I can give to the matter of that paper, can be adequate to the dishonour done me by the terms you have made use of. You have left me no alternative but to demand personal satisfaction of you for the affront you have offered me."

The challenge was, of course, accepted. Col. Watson, Chief Engineer of Fort William, was engaged as second to Francis, while Col. Pearse, Commandant of the Artillery, undertook the same duty for Hastings. The 'meeting' was arranged for the 17th August, 1780, and the place of meeting fixed at Alipore, near the Belvedere House. Francis himself records the affair in his *Diary* thus :—

16th August—Employed in settling my affairs, burning papers, etc., in case of the worst—dull work.

17th August—Arrived at the ground near Belvedere near an hour before Mr. H., who comes about 6 with Col. Pearse. Watson marks out a distance about 14 common paces, the same, he said, at which Mr. Fox and Mr. Adam stood. My pistol missing fire, I

changed it ; we then fired together and I was wounded and fell. I thought my backbone was broken and of course that I would not survive it."

COL. PEARSE'S DESCRIPTION

We get a detailed and complete account of the duel from Col. Pearse's published statement, as follows :—

"As soon as the suitable place was selected, I proceeded to load Mr. H.'s pistols ; those of Mr. F. were already loaded. When I had delivered one to Mr. H. and Col. Waston had done the same to Mr. F., finding the gentlemen were both unacquainted with the modes usually observed on these occasions, I took the liberty to tell them that if they would fix their distance, it was the business of the seconds to measure it. Col. Waston immediately mentioned that Fox and Adam had taken 14 paces, and he recommended the distance. Mr. H. observed, it was a great distance for pistols, but as no actual objection was made to it, Watson measured and I counted.

"I then told them it was a rule that neither of them were to quit the ground till they had discharged their pistols, and Col. Watson proposed that both should fire together without taking any advantage.

"Mr. F. drew his trigger but his powder being damp, the pistol did not fire. Mr. H. came down from his "present" to give Mr. F. time to rectify his priming.

"Again the gentlemen took their stands, both presented together and Mr. F. fired. Mr. H. did the same at the distance of time equal to the counting of one, two, three distinctly, but not greater. His shot took place. Mr. F. staggered and in attempting to sit down, fell and said he was a dead man. Mr. H. hearing this, cried out, "Good God ! I hope not", and immediately went up to him, as did Col. Waston, but I ran to call the servants.

"On my return I found Mr. H. standing by Mr. F. but Col. Watson was gone to fetch a cot, or palanquin, from Belvedere to carry him to town.

A sheet was brought to bind up the wound, and Mr. H. and myself bound it around his body." "

HASTINGS' LETTERS

After this, Col. Pearse's narrative goes on to describe how Francis was carried into the Belvedere House where "the Surgeons, Dr. Campbell, the Principal, and Dr. Francis the Governor's own surgeon", sent by Hastings, found him. When Dr. Francis returned, he informed the Governor that the wound was not mortal.

In a letter written by Hastings to his wife some days after the duel, he says :—

"I have now the pleasure to tell you that Mr. F. is in no manner of danger, the ball having passed through the muscular part of his back just below the shoulder, but without penetrating or injuring any of the bones."

In a later letter Hastings says :—"Mr. F. continues well and I pronounce his cure certain."

In conclusion, I may mention that the place where this famous duel took place, is generally conjectured to be in an avenue near the Belvedere House in Alipur, and the event is commemorated by the name of "Duel Avenue", bestowed on the road.

The Fort of Pratapaditya

Another Vanishing Feature of Old Calcutta

Pratapaditya, the last independent king of Bengal, ruled at Jessore in the 17th Century. Early in youth he had formed the idea of an independent kingdom of Bengal and laid his plans accordingly. He created an army and a navy of his own, placing the latter under the command of Captain Roderick (or 'Rodda'), who had once been a pirate chief whom Pratapaditya had subdued. Pratap's ambitious designs to found an independent kingdom were naturally resented by the then Mogul Emperor, Akbar, who sent several expeditions against him, all of which were defeated by Pratap. Finally, after the death of Akbar, his son, Emperor Jehangir, sent a force under the famous Rajput General, Raja Mansinha, and at last Pratap was defeated and taken prisoner, but the defeat was mainly due to the treachery of one of his own men.

During his heroic struggle for independence with the help of his Portuguese Commandant Rodda, Pratap had built several forts close to Calcutta, *viz*, one at Mutlah, one at Raigardh (the modern Garden Reach), one at Behala, one at Tannah (on the opposite side of the river Ganges, on the site of the present Botanical Gardens), etc. These forts have all disappeared in course of time, though one of them—Tannah Fort—survived till the 18th Century. In the year 1756, when Sirajud-dowla with a large army attacked and took Calcutta, Tannah Fort had been strengthened and garrisoned by the English. The English, however, were unable to hold it, being driven out by the forces of Sirajud-dowla.

OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



BENGALI SOCIETY :

ITS

MANNERS and CUSTOMS



A *nautch* party at a Bengali household where the Englishmen were welcome guests.

THERE ARE PLENTY OF DOCUMENTS, RECORDS, DIARIES, newspapers, etc., from which historians have obtained materials regarding European Society, its manners and customs in Old Calcutta, but very little material is available from which we can find out how the Indian citizens of Calcutta lived, how they earned their money and spent it, what were their amusements, their food, dress and so on. It was not until the 19th Century was well advanced that a fruitful source of information became available, viz., the Bengali newspapers, which began to be published from 1818.

ASSOCIATION WITH ENGLISHMEN

In the very first place it should be noted that Indian residents of Calcutta in the 18th and up to the early 19th Century were mostly engaged in business with Englishmen, or served under them, and many of them amassed huge fortunes in this manner. For instance, in a news item published in September, 1818, recording the death of Babu Gopi Mohun Tagore, it was stated that he had left a fortune of eighty lakhs of rupees.

In the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 12th April, 1792, appeared the following notice :—

“On Monday last died suddenly Cossinaut Baboo, a very opulent native and a man of a fair and respectable character. His remains were burnt the same evening according to the rites of the Hindoos, in a pile of Sandal and other rich wood, at the ghaut which bears his name.

“Cossinaut Baboo is said to have died worth upwards of 60 lakhs of rupees, which by his Will he has divided among his four sons.”

I may inform the reader that 'Cossinaut Baboo' was Kashinath Mitra, an opulent merchant, who later became Dewan to the Kasijora Raj in Midnapur. The burning ghat in his name (Kasi Mitter's ghat) exists to this day. To continue, however, it would be no exaggeration to say that the leaders of Indian society in Calcutta in those days were mostly men, who had profited largely through their connection with the East India Company, or as *Banians* to the English firms, or through trade.

MONEY EARNED AND SPENT

The money amassed by them was spent, and frequently spent in a lavish manner, on ostentatious display on occasions of marriage or funeral ceremonies, in celebrating the *Durga Puja*, in founding banks or other commercial enterprises, in purchasing blocks of land or house-property, as well as in helping the spread of English education by founding schools, text-book societies, helping publication of books, encouraging the cause of female education and other social reforms; or in building roads, bridges, *ghats*, temples, *dharamsalas* (free guest-houses for pilgrims) and other works of a philanthropic or religious nature.

Many wealthy men spent money in maintaining or encouraging "*Jatras*" (open air type of plays mostly based on mythological subjects) or *Kobis* (poetical or doggerel compositions, sometimes extempore, between two parties in competition) and similar forms of entertainment in vogue. Later, it was due to the munificence of the wealthy citizens of Calcutta that the first amateur "Theatres", based on the English model, were established. It was Prasanna Kumar Tagore, who, in 1831, established the first Theatre (the Hindu Theatre) in which performances were given by

amateurs in English, of the plays of Shakespeare or translations of Sanskrit plays. It was from such amateur theatres established by the wealthy people that at a still later period (*viz.*, the seventies of the 19th Century) was evolved the "professional stage" of Calcutta.

INVESTMENT ON LAND

Another form of investment favoured by the wealthy people of those days was the purchase of large blocks of land or house-property. Some of our forefathers were shrewd enough to foresee an increase in value in later years, and as a result of their wise policy their descendants are now reaping the benefits. I may be permitted to digress here to give a few instances of land values of a century or more ago. The Chowringhee Theatre, which stood at the junction of Chowringhee Road and Theatre Road, was accidentally burnt down in 1839, and the corner-plot of land on which it had stood, was purchased by Dwarkanath Tagore (grandfather of Poet Rabindranath) for Rs. 15,000.

LOTTERY COMMITTEE

The Lottery Committee* made large purchases of land in improvement of Calcutta during the earlier half of the 19th Century, the highest prices paid by them being for land in the Strand and Clive Street, for which between Rs. 800 and Rs. 1,600 per *kottah* was paid. In the Loudon Street and

The "Lottery Committee" mentioned above was established under official sanction for the purpose of running public lotteries. Of the amount raised, a portion was spent as prizes, the balance being utilised for effecting improvements in the Town of Calcutta, such an opening out new roads, improving old ones, excavating tanks and so on. The Town Hall was built from these funds. Later, this method of raising money was prohibited by law.

Short's Bazar (*i.e.*, the present Short Street) locality the price was Rs. 500 per *kottah*, while an average price of Rs. 200 per *kottah* was paid for land in the Amherst Street and Cornwallis Street areas.

PRETTY HIGH RENTS

As regards letting values, pretty high rents were paid by the Englishmen of position. It appears from the records of the Supreme Court that a house belonging to Ram Rutton Tagore, which stood "on the Esplanade, to the east of the Court House" (*i.e.*, about the site of the present Town Hall) was let out on Rs. 800 a month to "some of the companies' servants". Later, we find an advertisement in the *Calcutta Gazette* offering to let the house at "a monthly rent of Rs. 500 which is reduced from Rs. 600."

GIFTS AND DONATIONS

Coming to munificent gifts and donations for charitable, philanthropic and similar purposes, hundreds of instances might be quoted, and there can be no doubt that the purse-strings of the wealthy Indian citizens of Calcutta were ever open to such demands. Dwarkanath Tagore gave a lakh of rupees to the District Charitable Society. Raja Baidyanath Roy (one of the sons of Maharaja Sukhmoy Roy, the first Bengali Director of the Bank of Bengal, and the builder of a road running from Uluberia upto the Lion Gate of the Jagannath Temple at Puri, etc.) gave a donation of Rs. 50,000 to the funds of the Hindu College and a sum of Rs. 20,000 to the cause of female education. One of his brothers, Raja Shib Chandra, had a bridge built over the river Karmanasa to help pilgrims on their way to Benares.

LAVISH EXPENDITURE

I will now give some instances of lavish expenditure and ostentatious display on occasions of marriage or *Sradh* ceremonies and in celebrating the *Durga Puja* :—

MARRIAGE

Samachar Darpan, 12th February, 1820 :—
“Babu Ramdulal Sircar has notified in the *Government Gazette* that his two sons will be married on the 7th and 11th *Falgun* and that the 1st and 2nd *Falgun*, have been fixed for the entertainment of the European guests, and the 13th to 16th *Falgun* for Hindu, Arab and Mogul guests, to attend at his house at Simla to dine there and see the *nautehes* and other entertainments provided.”

FUNERAL

Calcutta Gazette, 27th September, 1787 :—
“Neemoo Mullick, the rich Banker, is said to have spent lately three lakhs of rupees in the *shradh*, or funeral ceremony of his mother's death. It is on these occasions that the most parsimonious Hindoos incur great expense.”

Sambad Kaumudi, 14th May, 1825 :—“In a notice of the death and funeral ceremony of Ramdulal Sircar, it is stated that famous *Pandits* were brought from Benares, Kashmir, Maharastra, Kanauj, etc., numbering about seven to eight thousand to grace the occasion, and that the ‘gifts bestowed on the occasion included golden and silver utensils, elephants, boats, carriages, etc. It is also stated that several lakhs of destitute people received alms of a rupee each, so that on this item alone, several lakhs of rupees were spent.”

DURGA PUJA

Calcutta Gazette, 20th October, 1814 :—“The Hindu holidays of the Doorga Poojah began yesterday and will continue until the 25th instant. Many of the rich Hindoos, vying with one another in expense

and profusion, endeavour by the richness of their festivals to "get a name amongst men." The principal days of entertainment are the 20th, 21st and 22nd, on which Nikhee,* the Billington of the East, will warble her lovely ditties at the hospitable mansion of Raja Kishun Chand Roy and his brothers, the sons of the late Raja Sookh Moy Roy. Nor will the hall of Neel Money Mullick resound less delightfully with the affecting strains of Ushoorun, who, for compass of voice and variety of note, excels all damsels of Hindusthan. Misree, whose graceful gestures would not hurt the practised eye of Parisot, will lead the the fairy dance on the boards of Joy Kishun Roy's happy dwelling. At Raja Raj Krishna's may be viewed with amazement and pleasure, the wonderful artifices and tricks on legerdemain of an accomplished set of jugglers, first arrived from Lucknow. Baboo Gopee Mohun Deb, urged by his usual anxiety to contribute to the amusement of the public, has besides a selection of the most accomplished *nautch* girls, engaged a singularly good buffoon, whose performances and those of a boy, who has the uncommon faculty of being able to dance with impunity on the naked edge of two sharp swords, may claim the title of unique. Besides these, the respective residences of Baboo Gopee Mohun Thakoor and Gooroo Pershad Bhowe have each its individual cause of attraction and promise to repay by a full measure of delight those who are content to forsake the calm repose of peaceful slumbers for the hum of men and squeeze of crowded assemblies."

ENGLISHMEN INVITED

We find from a newspaper report that in 1829, the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck ; the Commander-

* As regards, 'Nikhee', the following appeared in a Bengali newspaper, dated 16th October, 1819 :—

"There was a dancing girl in Calcutta, named Nikhee. A gentleman of fortune, being very much pleased by her singing and dancing, has now engaged her at a monthly salary of Rs. 1,000."

in-Chief, Lord Combermere, along with many other Englishmen, attended the *Durga Puja* festivals at Sovabazar Rajbati, and there are numerous instances showing that a good many Englishmen were always invited by the *élite* of the Calcutta Society to their places on such occasions.

POLYGAMY

Coming now to another aspect of social customs, we see that polygamy was still very much in vogue among our forefathers (specially among "*Kulin*" Brahmins) in the 19th Century, some of them marrying as many as 10 to a hundred wives, and it is stated that a good many of these wives were fortunate enough to see or receive visits from their husband only at intervals of several years.

PRACTICE OF SUTTEE

The practice of *Suttee*, *i.e.*, of wives immolating themselves on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands was greatly in vogue. From figures collected and published in 1822, it appears that in the years 1815, 1816, and 1817, the cases of *Suttee* performed in Calcutta alone numbered 253, 289 and 441 respectively, *i.e.*, a total of nearly a thousand cases in three years. I need hardly tell the reader that this custom or practice has never entirely disappeared, and even in these days, occasional cases are still reported.

In this connection it is interesting to see that an English lady, Miss Goldborne, writing in *Hartley House* (published in 1789), takes the view that the women, who thus immolated themselves in this supreme act of self-sacrifice, were deserving of honour rather than obloquy. She speaks of "those wives who, with a degree of heroism that, if properly directed, would do honour to the female world, make

an *affectionate and voluntary* sacrifice of themselves upon the funeral piles of their departed husbands."

I will also quote from an article in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1908, written by Sir Charles Elliot, *ex-Lieutenant-Governor* of Bengal, regarding 'the prevalence of the custom even in the modern times. He says :—"In all the cases recently reported, it appeared that in spite of legal prohibitions and the absence of any public opinion requiring the sacrifice, the woman had *insisted on offering* herself, and the men had been merely consenting, *not compelling parties*." (The Italics are mine).

A SYSTEM OF CONTROL

Previous to 1813, no steps were taken by the Government to check or prevent the practice of *Suttee*. In that year, a system of "inspection, regulation, control and report" was inaugurated, and the number of widows 'returned as burnt alive, in Bengal during the nine years from 1815 to 1823 was 5,425. At this time it was laid down by the Supreme Court that *Suttee* "within the limits of their jurisdiction" would be treated as murder. The result was, to quote the words of an English writer, that a widow might burn on one side of Circular Road but not on the other !

Many social reformers under the lead of Raja Ram Mohan Ray carried on a strong agitation against this custom and succeeded in getting a law passed in 1829, during the rule of Lord William Bentinck, prohibiting it throughout India.

FOOD AND DRESS

On the subject of the food and dress of our forefathers, I shall quote from some written notes or reminiscences left by my father, the late Babu Krishna Chandra Roy, who was

born in 1838. In order that the readers may appreciate these notes at their proper value, I may mention that my father spent his life as a teacher in the Government Education Service, and at the time of his retirement in 1895, held the joint Headmastership of the Hindu and Hare Schools in Calcutta—a unique position never held before or since by any other teacher. His descriptions and comments (written after his retirement in 1895) relate to middle-class people, and cover the mid-nineteenth century period and after.

CHANGE OF DIET

“In the matter of eating,” he writes, “we are getting anglicised. We were a purely vegetable-eating people, taking fish occasionally, small fish ordinarily and big-fish for feasting purposes. Goat’s flesh was allowed but very rarely taken. It could only be taken on certain *Puja* occasions as *mahaprasad* and that only by *Shaktas*. *Vaishnabs* would never touch it. Goats not sacrificed before some *Kali* or *Durga* were absolutely prohibited. Onion and garlic were disallowed formerly, but people have taken to them largely, as they fancy that they add flavour to food preparations, particularly meat preparations. At present we use various kinds of meats, the least objectionable of which is goat’s flesh, which may be taken any time.”

ORDINARY DRESS

On the subject of dress, he writes :—

“In our younger days we had coarse country-made *dhoti* for ordinary wear at home, and finer *dhoti* and *urani*, both country-made, such as, Simla, Dacca, Santipur, Farasdanga, etc., for outside purposes, seldom any coat or shoes. In winter we usually had a *dolai* which very few children of middle-class men now use. We had an old-fashioned *banian* or *jama*. Buttons and shirts were almost unknown. The *banian* was made of cloth doubled up on the breast, and this served to protect the

chest from cold. The sleeves were half, and, therefore, very convenient. As against this the *jama* generally had full sleeves. Neither *banian* nor *jama* extended much below the abdomen. Elderly men of moderate means generally used a *balaposh* which consisted of two pieces of *dhoti* (generally used-up ones) sewn up with a quantity* of cotton inside. Night-caps were very common. We had *kharam* (a kind of wooden clogs) for home use, and leather "slippers" (worth 4 to 6 annas) for outside purposes. English shoes were absolutely unknown. Some few, mostly young men, used country-made shoes.

"*Shawls* and *doshalas* were very rare. Amritsar stuff had not yet come into vogue. Such '*shawls*' as were to be found in wealthy families were genuine Kashmir stuff, and a single pair of them would be used by all the members of the family. On occasion broad-cloth of a coarse kind was also in use. We had *pirans* (shirts) and full stockings after then. Gradually, however, an endless variety of winter-cloth made in England began to be imported, and we lost our simple and economical habits of other days. Shirts, China-coats, half-stockings, and shoes of various kinds are in fashion; Amritsar *shawls* and English wrappers everywhere.

"Watches and chains were almost unknown in our younger days. Now, however, the commonest clerks on 20 or 30 rupees a month use them. High-priced English watches and long golden chains have given place to Geneva watches, and small chains of gold, silver, steel, etc., are common. A hair brush and a looking-glass are now to be met with in every house; and there are few that do not comb their hair, particularly when they go out. ✓ I have never used any myself, nor do I much like to see schoolboys take so much care, as they do now, of adjusting their hair in this fashion or that. It is only the idlers that do so."

OFFICIAL DRESS

"The official dress consisted formerly of a loose *pyjama*, a *jora* and a *lattodar pugri*. The

pyjama, being loose, was very convenient in some respects, but for walking fast or doing anything in a hurry, it was not. The *jora* was very clumsy and looked like an English lady's gown. The head-dress was too small. All these have disappeared, and we have now in their stead pantaloons, trousers, *chapkans*, half-*chapkans*, coats, surcoats, *shawl-pugries*, caps, *pugries* with a tail behind, called 'morosas' and what not."

Jungles and Villages in Old Calcutta

In the 17th Century (when Job Charnock first laid the foundations of Calcutta) the entire area, now forming the city, was composed of small and scattered villages standing among marshes, paddy fields and jungles, inhabited by fishermen, weavers and similar lowly folk. The greatest jungle of all stretched from what is now the Esplanade upto Alipur and is now the large open green space called the *Maidan*.

The English merchants had at first taken lease of the three villages, Sutanuti, Kalikota and Govindapur, from the Zemindar. A few years later, with the expansion of business and population, it became necessary to expand their territory and in 1717 the Company obtained permission from the Delhi Emperor to buy 38 villages, which made up the area now covered by Calcutta and Howrah. As the city grew, the villages were gradually wiped out. but their names (and locations) are in many cases still preserved in the present-day street names of Calcutta. The following names are taken from a contemporary document, and their old spelling is given, *viz* :—

Belgachia, Hogulchundey (now Hogulkuria), Ultadang, Similiah (or Sumilia, the village of the Simul Cotton trees, now Simla), Cancergasoia (Kan-kurgachi), Bagmarrey, Arcooly, Mirsapoor, Sealdah, Tangrah, Bergey (Birji), Tiltola (Tiljala), Topsiah, Cherangy (Chowringhee), Colimba (Colinga), Hintalley (the village of the Hantal or elephant grass, now Entally), Chitpoor, etc.

Some Historic Buildings

The *Old Fort* was built by the early English Settlers to the west of the great tank, or *Lal Dighi*, (now Dalhousie Square) as a protection to their Factory and Settlement. Its construction was begun during the governorship of Sir Charles Eyre (1700-1701), was gradually added to by the succeeding Governors, and completed about 1717-20. The Fort was heavily damaged during the attack on Calcutta in 1756 by the armies of Siraj-ud-dowla. Its ruins were not completely removed till 1819, after which the present Custom House, etc., were built on the site.

The new *Fort William* was begun to be built in 1758 and completed in 1773.

The construction of the present *Government House* was begun in 1799. The ground was purchased for Rs. 80,000; the building cost about 13 lakhs, and the furnishings cost Rs. 50,000.

The *Belvedere* in Alipore is believed to have been built in 1700 by Prince Azim-us-shan, Governor of Bengal and Behar (a grandson of Emperor Aurangzeb). In the year 1778, Warren Hastings leased out this house, along with the villages of Gopalnagar and Zeerut, to Captain Tolly, an Engineer in the Company's service. Later (in 1780) the house was purchased by Tolly, and after his death it was sold again, passing through several hands, until in 1854 it was purchased by Government for the use of the Lieutenant Governors of Bengal. It continued to be thus used until 1912 (when the capital was removed from Calcutta to Delhi) and is now the official residence of the Viceroy when he comes to Calcutta. It was to this house that Sir Philip Francis was brought, on the 17th August, 1780, when he was wounded in the famous duel with Warren Hastings.

Captain (later Colonel) Tolly is wellknown as the maker of "*Tolly's Nullah*" The old course of the Ganges, known as the Govindapore creek, was widened as a canal at his own expense, and he was permitted to charge tolls on the boats plying on it. The length of the canal is about $17\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the Ganges up to Samukpota, where it meets the river Bidyadhari.

OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS



CALCUTTA POLICE IN 1858

European Inspector, Indian Sergeant, and two Chowkidars
—one for the suburbs and the other for the city proper.

WHEN THE BRITISH TOOK UP THE GOVERNANCE OF this country and made Calcutta the centre of their activities, the laws as administered here were all British laws, and not only the laws but the Judges and the entire system connected with the administration of Justice were bodily imported from Britain. From a study of the legal machinery as working in Calcutta in the late 18th and the early 19th Centuries, it is evident that not only were the people of the times more robust and "downright", but the laws and punishments were more robustly and harshly administered than in a later and more humane age.

EUROPEAN RIFF-RAFF

In the early days of Calcutta, its floating population included a fairly large number of the riff-raff of the European countries, who had drifted to the town and formed a menace to the peace and safety of its law-abiding citizens. It was very unsafe to cross the *Maidan* after nightfall, even upto the end of the 18th Century, owing to the frequency of robberies and assaults committed there, sometimes by vagrant and masterless Europeans and occasionally even by soldiers from the Fort. We read in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 1st September, 1791 :—

"Last night about 10 o'clock, a very daring robbery was committed near the new Fort on Mr. Massuyk, who was in his palanquin, by eight Europeans, supposed to be soldiers. After wounding him severely, they took from him his shoe-buckles and every valuable he had about him. (The New Fort mentioned is, of course, Fort William, which was 'new' at the time, having been completed in 1773.

The modern reader may be puzzled why the shoe-buckles were stolen, but in those days broad buckles, made of silver or even gold and sometimes studded with jewels, adorned the shoes of gentlemen.)

THROAT-CUTTING LANE

A significant indication of lawlessness of the times is found in the popular name of Fordyce Lane, near the Sealdah end of Bowbazar Street, which was commonly called *gullakutta gully*, or throat-cutting lane, on account of murderous assaults in the locality. The following report of a dacoity in Colootollah appeared in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 22nd October, 1789 :—

“Last Saturday night fifty dacoits, Portuguese and Bengalees, broke open the house of Choitun Dutt at Colootollah and plundered it of about 6,000 rupees in money and goods. Choitun Dutt in attempting to resist, received several blows which had very nearly occasioned his death.”

CHARGE OF BURGLARY

In the First Criminal Sessions of the Supreme Court, held in 1795, a batch of five Europeans and one Bengali was tried on a charge of burglary and sentenced to death, and an interesting account appeared in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 30th July, 1795. The vigorous language of the concluding portion of the sentence, as recorded, is worth quoting *viz.*, “on the tenth day of August let them be taken from the jail to the place of execution, which place the Sheriff is hereby directed to prepare as near the house of Choitun Seal (at whose house the burglary had been committed) as conveniently may be, and there let the said (here the names of the condemned criminals follow) and each and every one of them be hanged by the neck until they and each

and every one of them are dead.' It will be seen that the Sheriff* was directed to prepare the place of execution as near to the scene of the crime as possible, it being then the usual custom to have condemned criminals executed publicly and as near to the scene of their crime as could be arranged. Capital punishment was in this way sought to be made more deterrent by making a public exhibition of it.

PLACE OF EXECUTION

From the Sheriff's records upto 1825, it appears that executions were mostly carried out at the 'usual place of execution' whice appears to have been 'near the Coolie Bazar' in Hastings, somewhere at or near the roads to the north of the present Kidderpore bridge ; but after 1825 the records mention 'the usual place of execution immediately to the

*The functions and duties of the Sheriff of those days were of diverse kinds and vastly different from those of the present day. The Sheriff, then, was in entire charge of the jail, being responsible not only for the safe custody of the prisoners, but also for all arrangements for feeding and clothing them. He had to see that all sentences imposed on criminals were duly carried out, and had to arrange for and attend at all executions,—the gallows, the pillory and other paraphernalia of punishment being in his charge. He had to execute writs and warrants issued by the Supreme Court, and for this his jurisdiction was not confined within the limits of Calcutta, extending also to the Mofussil—an elastic term, as it extended to Meerut on the one side, and to the borders of Madras on the other.

The Sheriff's officers, who actually executed these warrants, were dubbed 'Catchpoles' and were mostly recruited from the tough retired army sergeants. To execute warrants, they had sometimes to travel long distances, the journey being made

south of the jail' which had then been fixed upon. The gallows and the pillory were set up wherever and whenever required, or directed, by a contractor, named Joseph Simpson, who also supplied the cart for carrying prisoners to and from the jail.

MELANCHOLY POINT

For offences committed at sea, i.e., on board the ship, the criminals condemned to death had a separate place of execution at Melancholy Point on the opposite side of the river, below the present Botanical Gardens. The prisoners were conveyed there on a barge on which a gallows was erected and there duly hanged. A row of gibbets stood on the shore, and the dead bodies of the executed criminals were taken ashore and hung from the gibbets in chains. Ships coming to

by river or road, as convenient. By road they had to travel in the universal *palki* (palanquin), which served as a conveyance by day, and sometimes, placed under a convenient tree, as a bed-room by night. The roads were not at all safe in those days, and besides the *palki*-bearers, an armed retinue accompanied the Sheriff's officers. Sometimes, when their funds for travelling expenses gave out, the officers had to borrow money from the European residents on the way. The costs thus mounted up, and generally averaged one rupee a mile, so that in cases of warrants for distant places, the costs sometimes exceeded the value of the writ or decree. In 1824, several merchants of Cawnpore wrote to the Sheriff proposing that some of his officers should be posted at an up-country station to avoid the heavy costs, and accordingly some officers were kept posted in Benares, Patna and Agra. These arrangements continued up to 1862, when the jurisdiction of the Sheriff was curtailed, and confined within the limits of Calcutta.

moor in Calcutta were greeted by those gruesome relics hanging in chains from the gibbets along the shore. This practice was abolished after 1820, and the bodies of the executed criminals were sunk in the river off Prinsep's Ghat. The latter practice, it is found from records, was in vogue upto 1855.

WHIPPING

The punishment of whipping was very frequently resorted to in those early days, both among ordinary criminals and specially among military offenders. Regarding the latter, Mr. Carey in his book, *Good Old Days of Hon'ble John Company*, says :—

“The barbarous punishment of the lash appears to have been inflicted to its fullest extent till the year 1833. We have fallen upon an instance where ‘one thousand lashes on the bare back’ with cat-o’-nine-tails were awarded by sentence of Court-Martial in November, 1814.....It was not until August, 1833, that a general order limited the punishment of the lash to the more serious crimes of mutiny, insubordination, offering violence to a superior, etc.”

Leaving the case of military offenders, the ordinary criminals, sentenced to be whipped, were always whipped in public. The sentence sometimes was only for whipping and more often in addition to other punishments awarded. The citizens of Calcutta in those days were treated to the edifying spectacles of an offender being whipped from one end of a street to the other and back again, and no doubt it had a moral effect on the potential evil-doer. In a case, taken from the records of the Criminal Sessions held in 1795, we find that one Ramjoy Ghosh, convicted of the crime of stealing “of the value of ten pence” i.e., about ten annas, was sentenced to be kept in jail for a few days and then to be “carried to

Burra Bazar between the hours of ten in the morning and two in the afternoon, and to be whipped from the south end to the north end, and back again from the north end to the south end thereof, and then be discharged at Chitpore bridge." A common and much used route for these, public whippings was from the "Tank" (Dalhousie Square) along Lall Bazar "upto the house of Mr. Willoughby Leigh in Bow Bazar."

DIVERSE PUNISHMENTS

Punishments in Old Calcutta lacked nothing in point of diversity, and occasionally, ferocity. Among other punishments in vogue may be mentioned branding or "burning" in the hand (generally awarded to thieves), and exhibition in the pillory for hours at a stretch. The pillory consisted of a wooden frame supported upon a post, in the shape of a "T", the culprit's head and hands being thrust through holes in the upper part of the frame. It was set up at the crossing where four roads met (and still meet) *viz.*, Bentinck Street, Chitpore Road, Lalbazar and Bowbazar Streets. The unhappy wretch sentenced to this punishment had to stand for hours at a stretch, gaped at and jeered by the passing throngs, and to make the punishment more deterrent, a paper was affixed to the post setting forth details of his offence. This barbarous punishment had been in full and common use in England and other European countries and was imported from there, and though it was abolished in India in 1816, its use was continued in England till 1837.

A FEW CASES

From a study of the crimes and the punishments awarded, one cannot fail sometimes to be struck by the extraordinary variety and disproportionateness of the sentences, according

to modern ideas. For the crime of manslaughter a fine of one rupee was imposed, and while one criminal was hanged for the crime of burglary, another sentenced to transportation for 7 years for the crime of perjury. To enable the reader to form his own conclusions I give below a few cases taken at random from old records stating the crime and the punishment awarded to each case :—

1. Joseph Leperousse—murder and piracy—death and that his body should afterwards be hung in chains.
2. Byjoo Mussalchy—robbery—death.
3. Pauly Stratty, Catoul Kissen—conspiracy—two years, imprisonment and to stand in the pillory.
4. Ram Soonder Sircar—perjury—transportation for 7 years.
5. Ter Jadob Ter Petruse (an Armenian clergyman)—perjury—imprisonment for 2 years and a fine of one rupee.
6. Imambux—robbery—transportation for life.
7. Thomas Morgan—forgery—2 years imprisonment, to stand in the pillory and fine of one rupee.
8. Buxoo, Nyamutullah and others—robbery—transportation for life.
9. John Maclachlin—manslaughter—fine of one rupee.
10. Mohamed Tindal—manslaughter—fine of one rupee and imprisonment for one month.

In the words of an English writer, “the crimes of forgery and theft were considered by the legislators of those days more heinous than that of manslaughter.”

THE SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court of Judicature for the province of Bengal was established in “Fort William” in the year 1774. The first Chief Justice, Sir Elijah Impey, came out from England along with his three brother (Puisne) Judges, Hyde, Lemaistre and Chambers, in the ship “Anson”, and at the

same time the four now Members of the Council of the East India Company, *viz.*, Sir Philip Francis, Richard Barwell, General Clavering and Colonel Monson, sailed in the "Ashburnham". With Francis was his brother-in-law, Alexander Macrabie, (also spelt MacRabéy) who became the first Sheriff of Calcutta and attained immortality for presiding at the execution of Maharaja Nanda Kumar.

THE JUDGES

On their arrival and landing at Chandpal Ghat, the Judges were greeted with a salute of 19 guns fired from the Fort, but unfortunately the members of Council received a salute of only 17 guns. It is said that this caused much heart burning in the Members of Council, as they had expected at least an equal number as the Judges, if not more. Some writers even say that the quarrels and bad blood between Hastings and Sir Philip Francis, as well as the split in the new Council, originated from this alleged slight put upon the Members. To come back to the Judges, however, it may be mentioned that the salary of the Chief Justice was fixed at 80,000 rupees per year, and that of the Puisne Judges at 60,000 rupees a year.

TRIAL OF 'NUNCOOMAR'

The first case of capital importance, tried by the Judges of the Supreme Court, was the trial of Maharaja "Nuncoomar" (Nanda Kumar) on a charge of alleged forgery. The charge was laid against him on the 6th May, 1775, before Mr. Justice Lemaistre, who was the sitting Magistrate, and it is important to note that at that time the Judges of the Supreme Court were also Justices of the Peace for Calcutta.

Mr. Busteed, in his *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, remarks that this was a "most objectionable arrangement" as it

involved the eventual trial of a prisoner at the assizes by a Judge, who had already come to a conclusion as to his guilt. Lemaistre, however, did not make the commitment at once, but requested the assistance of Mr. Justice Hyde. Both sitting together the whole day and upto 10 o'clock at night, when "no doubt remaining in the breast of either of us upon the evidence on the part of the Crown," a commitment was made.

ISSUE OF WARRANT

A Warrant was issued on the Sheriff, who was at the time and for a long time afterwards in entire charge of the Jail, and I quote here the exact wording of the Warrant as an interesting historical document:-

To the Sheriff of the Town of Calcutta and Factory of Fort William in Bengal, and to the Keeper of His Majesty's prison at Calcutta—

Receive into your custody the body of Maharajah Nuncoomar herewith sent you, charged before us upon the oaths of Mohun Persaud, Cumal-ul-dien and other, with feloniously uttering as true a false and counterfeit writing obligatory, knowing the same to be false and counterfeit in order to defraud the executors of Belakee Doss, deceased, and him safely keep until he shall be discharged by due course of law.

(Sd.) S. C. LEMAISTRE

(Sd.) JOHN HYDE

Given under our hands and seals this sixth day of May in the year of our Lord 1775.

PERSON OF HIGH RANK

Immediately after the commitment an unlooked for difficulty arose. Mr. Jarrett, an attorney, came and represented to the Judges that the Maharaja was "a person of very high rank, of the caste of Brahmins" and that he

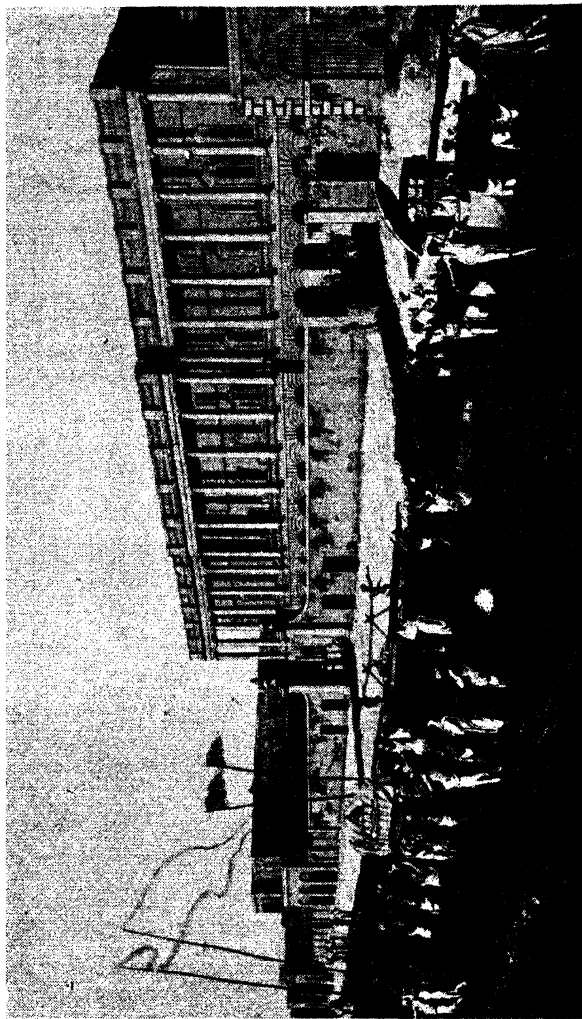
would be defiled if confined in the common jail. The order, however, was upheld, after the Judges had conferred with the Chief Justice. That was a Saturday. On the Monday following, a message was sent to the Chief Justice that the prisoner could not eat, drink or bathe in his place of confinement without losing his caste. On the Chief Justice enquiring how he might be accommodated, the Maharaja sent back the reply that he should live in a house in which no Christian or Mussulman had ever been or should be admitted, and that he might be permitted to wash once a day in the Ganges. These conditions, however, not being acceptable, the Maharaja continued to fast.

TO DIE OF INANITION

Though confined under a criminal charge, the Maharaja had high and responsible position under the Nawab only recently having been Fouzdar (Magistrate) of Hoogly, and later, Dewan of Bengal, Behar and Orissa. The Judges were in quandary ; they could not unbend to the extent of allowing him to live in a separate house, nor could they allow him to die of inanition. There was a meeting of the Governor-General's Council to discuss the situation that had arisen and the Sheriff was directed to see the Chief Justice about it.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Chief Justice then sent the Maharaja the opinion of four Pandits (Krishna Jiban, Banerwar, Krishna Gopal and Gouri Kanta Sharma) the substance of which was that though the taking of food in the circumstances was prohibited, if the Maharaja did eat or drink he might undergo a penance (*prayaschitta*) or purification ceremony afterwards. The Maharaja refused to accept this opinion and continued to fast.



THE SUPREME COURT BUILDING
(The present High Court buildings stand on this site)
From the engraving by T Daniell — 1787

The Chief Justice sent Dr. Murchison to see him and after hearing his report, at last, gave permission for a tent to be pitched for the Maharaja on the top of an out-house separate from the jail building, and here the Maharaja took sustenance on Thursday *i. e.*, on the 6th day of his fast. It is on record that even then "he walked to the outside of the prison without assistance and did not appear any way exhausted, and talked in the same tone of voice as he usually did" (though he was about 70 years old at that time).

EIGHT-DAY TRIAL

As the Supreme Court building had not yet been erected, this famous trial was held in the old Mayor's Court, which stood at the north end of our present-day Old Court House Street, *i. e.*, on the site where St. Andrew's Church now stands. The trial lasted 8 days, from the 8th to the 16th June, the Court sitting each day from eight in the morning till late at night, and the verdict of the Jury was not given till four o'clock in the morning of the 16th... The result of the trial is too well known to need repetition.*

TRIAL BY JURY

I will now leave the Judges and come to the Juries. The system of trial by Jury had taken firm root in the British mind, and the trial by "twelve good men and true" was a long-established tradition of British Law. The Supreme Court at once introduced this system in Calcutta, the conditions necessary for serving as a Juror being that the person must have been born in the British Isles, must profess the Protestant faith and be 21 years of age. The net was

* The Maharaja was executed, as is now generally agreed, somewhere at or near the roads to the north of the present Kidderpore bridge.

cast wide, and practically all Englishmen, resident in Calcutta, were made to serve, from Secretaries to the Government and Judges of the Sudder Dewani Adalat to carpenters, shoemakers, tavern-keepers, etc. It was not till the year 1800 that exemptions were allowed, and even then only the Secretaries, Magistrates, etc., were exempted. A Grand Juror, who failed to attend on being called upon, was fined 500 rupees and a Petty Juror 200 rupees. These fines were not merely imposed on paper, payment being promptly enforced by Warrants directed to the Sheriff to arrest and keep the delinquent in jail until the fine was paid. (In recent times the rules are not so harshly enforced and the only case of arrest of a Juror in modern times was in 1919 under orders of Mr. Justice Rankin).

JURORS' DIVERSE PROFESSIONS

An interesting fact emerges from the old lists of Jurors in the early 19th Century, *viz.*, that at that time Englishmen in Calcutta made their living by following many and diverse kinds of trades or handicrafts. In the present day, beside Government officials, practically all Europeans are members or employees of mercantile firms and trades, but a century and a half ago, we find from the Jury list such varied professions and occupations, as, jockey, coach-maker, tailor, ship-builder, house-builder, tavern-keeper, livery stable keeper, carpenter, cooper, school-master, dancing master, carver and gilder, painter, dentist, tanner, musical instrument maker, hair-dresser, etc., besides ordinary shop-keepers, merchants and their assistants. It should be remembered that where a man described himself as a cooper, it did not mean that he employed workmen to make barrels, but that he himself made barrels, or carved and gilded, or tanned leather, or made shoes and so on, with his own hands.

INDIANS AS JURORS

In those early days, service as Juror was the rule, and exemptions were rare, but in the present day the reverse is true and people mostly try to wriggle out of this civic duty if they can. We find, however, that in 1828 Anglo-Indians (generally, then, called "half-caste" Europeans) submitted a monster petition to the Court to be enrolled as Jurors, and the Court granted it. Later (after 1830), rules were passed making all citizens of Calcutta (Indians included) of a certain degree eligible to serve as Jurors.

A JURORS' BILL

In those early days, Jurors were kept confined in the custody of the Sheriff and his constables during the entire proceedings of a trial, and were given rooms to stay in, as well as meals, from the time the case opened until they had given their verdict. A bill submitted to the Sheriff in 1814 for the expenses of the Jury makes an interesting reading, and I quote it in full :—

| | Each at | |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| ✓ To Dinner for 12 Jurors | Rs. 4-0-0 | Rs. 48-0-0 |
| To 6 bottles of Madeira | 3-0-0 | „ 18-0-0 |
| „ 3 „ „ Port Wine | 3-0-0 | 9-0-0 |
| „ 2 „ „ Brandy | 4-0-0 | 8-0-0 |
| „ 6 „ „ Claret | 4-0-0 | 24-0-0 |
| „ 1 bottle „ Gin | 1-8-0 | 1-8-0 |
| „ 8 bottles „ Beer | 1-8-0 | 12-0-0 |
| „ Dinner for 3 Constables | 2-0-0 | 6-0-0 |
| „ Supper for 12 Jurors | 1-0-0 | 24-0-0 |
| „ „ „ 3 Constables | Re. 1-0-0 | 3-0-0 |
| „ Use of room, wax candles and oil ——— | | 12-0-0 |
| „ Breakfast for 12 Jurors | Rs. 2-0-0 | 25-0-0 |
| „ „ „ 3 Constables | Re. 1-0-0 | 3-0-0 |
| „ 1 bottle of Brandy | Rs. 4-0-0 | 4-0-0 |
| „ „ „ Gin | „ 1-8-0 | „ 1-8-0 |
| Total | | Rs. 187-0-0 |

MORE DRINK THAN FOOD

From a study of the bill it is evident that the Jurors of those days had nothing to complain of in the matter of food and drink, specially the latter. The bill shows that they were in attendance for not more than 24 hours, and that during this period each Juror on an average drank half a bottle of Madeira, half a bottle of Claret, quarter bottle of Port Wine, about a bottle of Beer, and a fair allowance of Brandy and Gin. It is no wonder that the charges for the Jurors came up to about Rs. 150 a day, sometimes more, and the Government had to interpose. It was fixed (in 1851) that the charges for entertaining the Jury must in no case exceed Rs. 80 per day. The present day Jurors (9 in number and not 12) are neither kept in the custody of the Sheriff nor given sumptuous meals.

WHEN JURY WAS CALLED

It was not only in criminal cases that the citizens of Calcutta served as Jurors in the olden days. A "Rule, Ordinance and Regulation" had been promulgated as far back as in 1785, under which the Justices and Magistrates were empowered to acquire land or houses for the "improvement of Calcutta". Whenever any acquisition was made, if the owner of the house or land agreed to accept the compensation fixed by the Justices, the matter ended there. If, however, there was any dispute or disagreement as to the amount of compensation, the Sheriff was directed to summon 24 persons, from whom a Jury of 12 was selected in order to settle the dispute. It was provided that in cases where the property to be acquired belonged to an Indian, Indians were to be included in the Jury.

PRESIDENCY JAIL

Coming next to the subject of Jails, the Calcutta Jail or "Harin-bari," commonly called the Presidency Jail, stood on the site of the present Victoria Memorial. The Jail was a small establishment at first, as in 1802 we find there were only 26 criminals, of whom 13 were soldiers under sentence, of transportation and 46 debtors. At that time imprisonment for debtors was of common occurrence, and I can not do better than quote a few lines describing the prevailing state of affairs in Calcutta from Mr. Charles Moore's excellent work, The Sheriffs of Calcutta :—

"Today, if a man is indebted to another for a few thousands of rupees he begins to regard the matter as being sufficiently serious to engage his most earnest attention...To some of the Englishmen of those days, such a state of affairs would have savoured of the dull monotony of a mediaeval monastery. The man, who did not owe 10,000 rupees in Old Calcutta, must have braved the terrors of the ocean and the tropics for pleasure...Money was easily made, debts were easily contracted, and there seems to have been no end to the number of people willing to lend or give credit, and in such a happy state of society there were sure to be unlimited numbers ready to borrow and to spend...A debtor with means could be quickly made to pay, the legal machinery for compelling men to do so being quick and effective. Or, where he had no visible property he might be arrested and kept in jail so long as his creditor was willing to pay the sum of four rupees per month for his board and lodging."

JAIL ADMINISTRATION

As regards jail administration, in the matter of food, all European prisoners, whether criminals, or debtors, civil or military, were treated alike, being given an allowance of two annas per day, or four rupees a month, while the food

allowance for Indian prisoners was one anna per day or two rupees a month. It is worthy of note, however, that even criminals were freely allowed to have food brought in from outside if they could afford it or had friends and relatives willing to help. In this way it was not very difficult to smuggle in liquor for the Europeans or opium for the Indians.

The food charges were later (in 1830) increased to eight and four rupees respectively for European and Indian prisoners, and finally in 1855, the system of giving them money was abolished and the Government undertook their maintenance. Drinking water for the prisoners was obtained from the tank to the west of the Jail. As for bedding and clothing the Sheriff was allowed a sum of 600 rupees per annum for this purpose, which was woefully inadequate, and mostly the prisoners were in rags.

MILITARY PRISONERS

Taking the Military prisoners first, European soldiers under sentence of transportation were kept confined in the jail until arrangements were made to ship them off to New South Wales (Australia) or Van Diemen's land (now called Tasmania) which is an island at the south-eastern tip of Australia. The number of such prisoners, we find even upto 1858, was less than a hundred. When they were shipped out, they used to get a sum of 60 rupees as outfit cost, but it was found that the money was mostly spent on brandy.

PRISONERS' OUTFITS

About 1830 the Government directed that instead of money, each convict should receive an outfit as follows:— 1 blue cloth jacket, 1 flannel shirt, 2 duck frocks, 3 duck trousers, 1 black silk neck-cloth, 2 red caps, 1 straw hat, 2 pairs of shoes, 1 mattress, 1 pillow, as well as 10 seers of green tea, 1 maund of sugar, 1 tea-pot, 2 white basins, 2 seers of country

soap, 3 dozen needles and 13 balls of sewing thread. In the case of Indian convicts under sentence of transportation, they were sent to Akyab, Moulmein, Prince of Wales Island and Bencoolin, and in the matter of outfit they were only provided with "two pieces of coarse cotton cloth", and nothing more.

For the European convicts, the shipping companies charged 200 rupees each for passage money to Australia, and the Government had to provide their bedding, clothing, food and even water for the voyage. Occasionally, the ships were lost in mid-ocean and we read that the barque "Lady Munro", carrying 10 convicts as well as other passengers, sank off the Isle of Amsterdam in October, 1833. Out of 97 persons on the ship, 75 including 8 of the convicts perished, the rest being rescued by a passing ship. From 1862, the sending out of Military convicts to Australia was stopped and they were sent to England instead.

DEBTOR PRISONERS

It is when we come to the debtor-prisoners that we find an astonishing state of things prevailing in the jail. Jail for them meant merely confinement within certain limits, but otherwise they were allowed privileges to any extent that they could manage to afford. For example, we read of a prisoner, named Captain Stewart, who had his pony brought to the jail morning and evening for rides "to maintain his health", and we read of "an eternal flow of brandy" within the jail.

The debtor-prisoners occupied good quarters, were waited upon by their own servants, obtained food and drink from the best hotels. They took evening walks, of course, within the jail compound, and after sundown a cheerful company assembled on the roof of the Harinbari jail, and passed a merry evening with drinks flowing in unlimited quantities. On occasion they even invited and entertained friends from

outside to dinner, with best food, best wines and best music. Even the prisoners' families could come and stay with them, if they did not mind captivity. Last and most amazing of all, we read of the prisoners bringing even their "mistress" to the jail to share their captivity and "it was all open and unashamed, and there was no pretence or disguise about the matter."

TWO CASES CITED

I will conclude by describing the cases of two debtor-prisoners in violent contrast with each other. The first was Prince Mouz-ud-din, a son of Tipu Sultan (It is worthy of note that Prince Mohamed Furruck Shah, who was Sheriff of Calcutta in 1891, belonged to the same family, being a grandson of Mouz-ud-din's brother, Prince Gholam Mohamed). To such persons, we are told, the jail was merely a prison in the sense that they were confined to its spacious quarters and surroundings. Beyond this, they did as they pleased. The incarcerated prince spent over 300 rupees a month on bazar expenses alone, was waited upon by a retinue of numerous servants, including washermen and tailors, and purchased his clothing from leading firms in Calcutta. He slept in a bed which cost 400 rupees, while Cashmere shawls, cut-glass mirrors and chandeliers and every other paraphernalia that a rich man could desire, were to be found in his apartments in the jail.

In sad contrast to this is the case of Rowland Scott, who was imprisoned in August, 1795, for a debt of sicca rupees 9,000 odd. Eighteen years later, in 1812, we find him still rotting in jail, then an old man of 60, and petitioning Sir John Royds, one of the Judges of the Supreme Court, to take his "lamentable" case into "humane consideration."

The ways of British Justice in those days were indeed strange and remarkable!

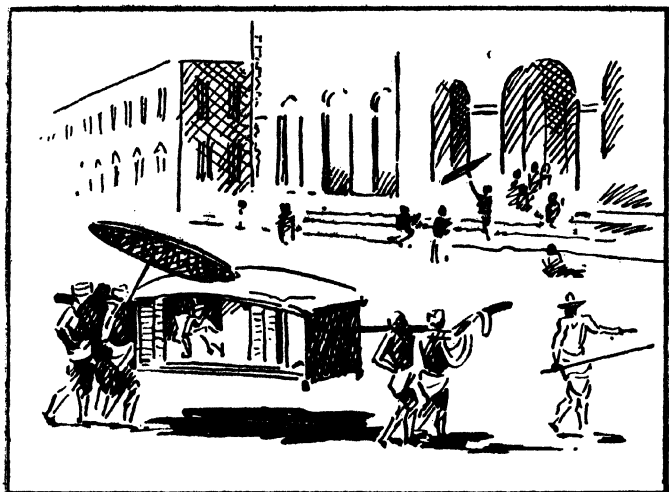
OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



TRAVELLING

AND

TYPES OF CONVEYANCE



.....For travelling inside the town of Calcutta, as well as for long overland journeys, the *Palki*, palanquin, was mainly in use.

TRAVEL NOW-A-DAYS MEANS SPEED AND MORE SPEED. Railway trains, power-driven ships, motor cars, omnibuses, trucks and cycles, and finally aeroplanes are constantly being improved in order to make possible faster and ever faster travel. But our forefathers in Old Calcutta in the 18th and the 19th Centuries were content to move about in slow and cumbrous vehicles of various types either drawn by horses or borne on the shoulders of men.

ARRIVAL OF EUROPE GOODS

Then, it took sailing ships ("East Indiaman", they were called) several months to do the voyage from England to India. The arrival of a ship in Calcutta was, therefore, a great event in the lives of the exiled (or self-exiled) Englishmen eager to get letters, messages or parcels from their near and dear ones at home. Consignments of "Europe goods" also arrived and were prominently advertised and displayed for sale. The length of time taken for the voyage is made clear from the advertisements in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the late 18th Century, offering "fresh" Europe goods for sale. One advertisement appearing in the month of July, describes the goods as being "of the latest fashion and highest perfection, having left Europe so late as February last," that is to say, only six months previously !

For travelling inside the town as well as for long overland journeys, the *palki*, or palanquin, was mainly in use. This box-like contrivance could be seen in Calcutta even a few years ago, mainly used by "purdah" ladies for going short distances, or by the old and the infirm. In general, the palanquins used in Calcutta in the 18th Century were roomy comfortable and gorgeous, being richly gilt, painted,

upholstered and covered with silks and satins, and some had the poles partly mounted in silver so that a single *palki* cost three or four thousand rupees. Describing this kind of "long palanquin," as it was called, F. Baltazard Solvyns, an Italian painter, who came to India in the last years of the 18th Century and made drawings illustrative of Indian life, says :—

"This species of palanquin is much used in all towns in which Europeans have settled, such as, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, etc....It is of good construction and has lanterns with four bearers, and is preceded by *hircaras* and *peadas*. The movements of the bearers are so easy that they are scarcely felt by the person in the palanquin, though they are at the same time very rapid and get over a great deal of ground in a short time. They change sides with astonishing promptness, still running on, and without interrupting their song or conversation. Throughout all Hindoostan, there are changes of bearers, as there are of post-horses in Europe.... During my stay in Calcutta I found some of these palanquins were made at the price of eight to twelve hundred pounds, but the ordinary cost is no more than twenty to forty pounds."

'PALKI' JOURNEY DESCRIBED

The letters of Miss Sophia Goldbourne, descriptive of 18th Century Calcutta life, published in 1786, under the title of *Hartley House*, contain many references to palanquins, from which the following extract is taken :—

"From the point, where we landed, to the Esplanade, is almost four miles ; swiftly did we pass along, for it seems the palanquin bearers (with proper relays, as is the case with those that perform journies) are so expert that, in defiance of the heat, etc., they go at the rate of from nine to twelve miles per hour.

"The travelling palanquins are so constructed that you repose as on a couch, served with your *loll*

shrub or other favourite refreshments, and thus, with incredible expedition, are conveyed to the distance of five hundred or any other number of miles up the country ; and there is no other mode of travelling by land whatever."

[The words "loll shrub" used by Miss Goldbourne, as quoted above, are a corruption of "*lal Sharab*," or red wine, *viz.* Claret, which was the drink most favoured by Englishmen in the 18th Century.]

RELAYS OF BEARERS

We see from these extracts that the only form of conveyance for long overland journeys was the palanquin, of course, with the help of "dawks," or relays of bearers, placed along the main roads. The difficulties of such journies were many and various, such as, *Kutchas*, or badly kept, roads, jungles infested with wild animals, depredations of bands of robbers and other perils. A notice appearing in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 14th April, 1786, gives details regarding these "dawks", or relays of bearers, and announces their re-establishment "upon the new road from Calcutta to Benares and Patna".

FARES FOR JOURNEYS

The fare, for the journey from Calcutta to Benares, was fixed at *sicca* rupees five hundred ; from Calcutta to Patna at *sicca* rupees four hundred, and from Calcutta to any intermediate stations at the rate of "one rupee two annas per *coss*." Travelling by *dawk palaki* continued well up to the 19th Century but for people of limited means the cost was prohibitive and they had to avail of the ubiquitous bullock-cart, with a thatch or covering of split bamboos and cloth and a layer of straw inside to serve as a "shock-absorber" against the jerks and jolts incidental to badly kept roads. -

FASTER MEANS OF TRAVEL

In passing it may be mentioned that by the middle of the 19th Century attempts were being made to adopt faster means of travel, such as, "bullock-trains", etc. In 1850, a wealthy Indian, named Tunti Mull, jointly with some Europeans, started horse-carriage "dawks" from Calcutta to Cawnpore under the style of the "Inland Transit Co." In that year the Government also started "covered parcel vans" with accommodation for four passengers in each to run between Benares, Meerut, Agra and Delhi. Their rate of speed was seven miles per hour and passengers were charged at the rate of one anna per mile. After this, came railway trains, the first railway (the East Indian line) being opened in 1855, though at first it ran only from Calcutta to Raneegunge, a distance of 120 miles.

CHAIR PALANQUINS

Returning to Calcutta of the 18th Century, other types of conveyance similar to the palanquin were also in use, called Sedan Chairs and Chair Palanquins, etc. They were also borne on men's shoulders and were of an open type. The following description of Sedan Chairs is taken from Mr. W. C. Sidney's book on *England in the 18th Century* :—

"The only public vehicles in use in the public streets (of London) were Sedan Chairs and Hackney Coaches. The former, which derived their name from the little town of that name in the Ardennes, were extensively patronised by the metropolitan habitues, beaux and belles alike, when proceeding to the innumerable Court Drawing Rooms, royal levees, theatres, balls and assemblies. Sedan chairs were so constructed as to admit of the roof being pushed up in order to allow of their occupants standing upright in them, and closed tightly down when they had taken their seats. People of quality usually kept

their own chairs, which were fitted up and decked out in the most lavish and extravagant manner, emblazoned with their coat of arms, lined with silk or satin, and placed regularly in the hall ready for use."

JOURNEY ALONG WATERWAYS

The only feasible method other than undertaking overland journeys in those days was by means of boats along the great waterways of the country. This was also not devoid of risks and dangers, chiefly from the attacks of pirates or dacoits. * Many waterways were infested with river-dacoits, who attacked travellers' boats in bands of half a dozen to a score of boats, and spared neither Europeans nor Indians. We read that in 1780, a Mr. Burgh was killed and thrown into the river while proceeding from Dacca to Calcutta. Another European, Mr. Willes, preceeding from Sylhet at the same time was attacked and his belongings plundered, though he escaped with his life. Such instances were quite numerous, and dozens might be quoted. As to the cost of travelling by boat from Calcutta, and the time taken for such journey the following notice taken from the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 21st April, 1785, is illuminating :—

Boats of all denominations supplied at the Police office (which office becomes responsible for the conduct and good behaviour of the *Manjies*, etc.) at the following rates :—

For a budgeraw of 8 dandies, per day

sicca rupees 2/-

For a budgeraw of 10 dandies, per day

sicca rupees 2/8/-

For a woollock of 4 dandies, per month

sicca rupees 22/-

In the notification the average time taken for journeys from Calcutta to several places is also given, from which the total cost may be worked out, *viz* :—

| | | | |
|---------------------|---|------|------|
| To go to Berhampore | . | 20 | days |
| „ Murshidabad | . | * 25 | „ |
| „ Rajamehal | . | 37½ | „ |
| „ Mongheer | . | 45 | „ |
| „ Patna | . | 60 | „ |
| „ Benares | . | 75 | „ |
| „ Cawnpore | . | 90 | „ |
| „ Fyzabad | . | 105 | „ |
| „ Maldah | . | 37½ | „ |
| „ Rungpore | . | 52½ | „ |
| „ Dacca | . | 37½ | „ |
| „ Luckhipore | . | 45 | „ |
| „ Chittagong | . | 60 | „ |
| „ Goalpara | . | 75 | „ |

From the above time-table, the journey by boat to Benares took three and a half months to accomplish, and for a budgeraw of 8 dandies, cost Rs. 150/-.

So far I have been describing the different modes of travelling by means of conveyances borne on men's shoulders or boats propelled by man-power. As regards horse-drawn vehicles in use at the time, it may easily be imagined that their use was greatly restricted owing to the bad condition of the roads in those early days, but concurrently with improvements in roads their use developed and increased. Within the town of Calcutta, the types of horse-drawn vehicles commonly to be seen were buggies, gigs, curricles, postchaises, etc., but these were used mostly for show and for the occasions, such as, evening drives or social visits. We read of carriages drawn by 4 or 8 horses, gorgeously caparisoned, with *syces* dressed in resplendent uniforms running beside them, and similar extravagant displays. The taste in carriages ran to many-coloured and opulent designs, as the follow-

ing advertisement taken from the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 1st March, 1801, will show :—

“Mr. F. W. Parkinson respectfully informs his patrons that he has just received for sale a highly finished crane-necked post-chaise painted dark green and lined with yellow morocco, built by Godsall and Co., by particular order of a gentleman for this country, price *sicca* rupees 3,500/-.

“Also an elegant and extremely light swan-necked post-chaise of the last fashion, body painted light blue, carriage dark, picked out to correspond with the body, lined with yellow morocco and suitable lace, *sicca* rupees 3000/-.”

CARRIAGE AND HORSE

Carriages and horses were regularly hired out by livery stable-keepers, most of whom carried on their business in the Cossaitollah area (modern Bentinck Street locality). One of the earliest livery stable keepers was Charles Meredith, and a street in this locality still bears the name. We obtain an idea of the prevailing rates of hire from the following advertisement in the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 26th March, 1801 :—

“Christopher Dexter begs leave to inform the gentlemen of Calcutta and the public in general that he continues to let out carriages and horses on the following terms, *viz.* :—

A coach and four, per day—*sicca* Rs. 24

A coach and four, by the month—*sicca* Rs. 300

A chariot and pair, per day—*sicca* Rs. 16

A chariot and pair, by the month—*sicca* Rs. 200

A coach and pair to Garden Reach or anywhere within five miles of Calcutta to breakfast or dinner—*sicca* Rs. 10

-do- to Barrackpore—*sicca* Rs. 18

A carriage and pair to go a-shopping, for the first hour, *sicca* rupees eight, if more than one hour and within two hours, rupees twelve and so on.”

✓ ROYAL MAIL.

* As new roads continued to be opened out and improvements made in old roads, both within and outside the town, horse-drawn carriages began to be more widely used, and the ancient palanquin, etc., dropped into disuse. From the *Calcutta Gazette* of 1815, we find some advertisements by J. Bacon, describing himself as the proprietor of the "Royal Mail" service sanctioned by Government, announcing that "an establishment of Royal Mail coaches are about to take place between Calcutta and Diamond Harbour, to run every morning and evening for the respective Mail offices in Calcutta and at Diamond Harbour as soon as the road to ✓ Diamond Harbour is finished." He states further that "there will be relays of horses at every eight miles on the road, for the purpose of expediting the mails, in performing the distance of 32 miles in four hours" and that "the Mail will carry four inside and six outside passengers." Another advertisement by ✓ J. Bacon announces a similar service from Calcutta to Barrackpore, carrying six inside and eight outside passengers, "to run from the Mail office on the west side of Tank Square (the modern Dalhousie Square), opposite Messrs. Greenway and Company's Library every evening at half past five O'clock, and Barrackpore every morning at the same hour."

OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



MONEY EARNING

AND

FOOD PRICES



A Bengali *Sircar* of Old Calcutta, whose association with money-making is proverbial.

IT HAS BEEN FREELY RECORDED AND FRANKLY ADMITTED by many English historians and writers that the dominating purpose of the Englishmen, who came to India in the 17th and the 18th Centuries, braving the perils of a long sea-voyage and the worse perils and risks of a tropical climate, was to "make money". To amass a fortune as quickly as possible by fair means if possible, or by foul, and then to shake the dust of India from their feet and return to their homeland to spend their gains, was the goal of practically all Englishmen of those days, and the opportunities were enormous, specially after the fall of Siraj-ud-dowla (in 1757) when the English assumed ruling power and were in a position to dictate terms to the puppets set up by them successively on the throne of Murshidabad. The entire resources of Bengal,—its trade, manufactures, monopolies and other privileges, were at the disposal of the English adventures, merchants and employees of the East India Company, as well as their Indian underlings, hangers-on, friends, or favourites.

FORTUNE HUNTING

Lest I should be libelling them in calling them "adventurers", I may quote Edward Terry, who says:—"It was usual then for parents and guardians (in England) to send unruly spirits out to India, that they might make their graves in the sea or on the Indian shore." They came in ever-increasing numbers, all bent upon making their fortunes. As Busteed, in his *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, says :—

"If the Europeans, who went to India in the old days, had a hard time of it, they at all events got what they went out for—money, and if they survived, they returned home wealthy men. The Government of India had to remonstrate against the

number of covenanted servants far in excess of the wants of the country which greedy patronage had sent out, and added : "Every one of them aspires to the rapid acquisition of *lakhs*, and to return to pass the primes of their lives at home, as multitudes have done before them".

LUST AND CORRUPTION

Corruption and underhand dealings were so rampant that Clive, Sumner and Verelst were appointed Commissioners of Inquiry into the conduct of civilian administrators, and in the course of a Report submitted by them to the Court of Directors (in England) in 1765, they stated :—

"Referring to their conduct, the transactions seem to demonstrate that every spring of the Government was tainted with corruption ; that principles of rapacity and oppression universally prevailed, and that every spark and sentiment of public spirit was lost and extinguished in the abandoned lust for universal wealth."

RICHARD BARWELL

That even the highest in the land were tainted with this "lust for universal wealth" would appear from the case of Richard Barwell, a Member of the Supreme Council, as described by Busted. He says :—

"It would seem that the accusation against Barwell was anything but 'ill-founded'. We learn that Barwell held the lease of two salt farms, which he sublet to two Armenians on condition of an extra consideration to himself of Rs. 1,25,000. One of these merchants afterwards complained that Barwell having taken the money, dispossessed him and re-let the farms to someone else for another lakh of rupees. Bolts, in his *Considerations on Indian Affairs* (published in 1775) remarks :—'Civil Justice is entirely eradicated... and the whole inland country is actually in a most deplorable state

of anarchy, under the despotic sway of one, or at most a very few English gentlemen and their (Indian) *Banians*.' He, then, goes on citing instances, in one of which an Armenian merchant, named, Parseek Arratoon, brought a suit in the Calcutta Mayor's Court on the 15th September, 1767, against the *gomasthas*, or agents, of Governor Harry Verelst and Francis Sykes, Esquire, for damages amounting to Rs. 90,000 on account of salt forcibly taken out from his godown. The suit was heard in August, 1768, and judgment upon the point of being pronounced, when the Mayor, sitting in judgment, received a private letter from the Governor to put a stop to the proceedings, because, it was alleged, he, the said Governor, was in expectation of settling matters by a private compromise. To the astonishment of the Plaintiff's solicitor, who declared he knew of no compromise,.....a stop was at once put to the proceedings, the plaintiff being left without any satisfaction."

TREASURY OF MURSHIDABAD

I shall now go on to describe a few outstanding financial transactions of the period. To appreciate them at their full value, it is necessary to go back to the year 1756, when Seraj-ud-dowla with an army of 50,000 attacked and took Calcutta. After re-naming the town as "Alinagar" and staying here only a few days, Seraj returned to Murshidabad. The next year saw his downfall at the field of Plassey, after which Clive and Admiral Watson re-took Calcutta. Where previously the English had been supplicants, they were now in a position to dictate terms. Their own nominee, Meer Jaffer, was put on the throne of Bengal (though he was later pulled down to suit the convenience of the English). All this is a matter of history but it has to be recapitulated so that the reader may appreciate what follows. First of all, after the fall of Seraj-ud-dowla, Clive, the conqueror, along with his

favourites and toadies helped themselves freely to the contents of the Nawab's Treasury in Murshidabad.

CLIVE'S SHARE

Regarding Clive's own share, I will quote a few lines from Carey's *Good Old Days of John Company* :—

"Having placed Meer Jaffer on the *musnud* at Murshidabad, and entered into solemn engagements with him for a strict union and mutual support, Clive returned to Calcutta on urgent public and private duties. The wealth, he acquired from this revolution, excited envy at the moment, and became afterwards a subject of reproach and even of accusation. The illiberal charges are best answered in the following emphatic observation of Clive himself, when personally accused at the Committee Meeting in Calcutta of having received upwards of £100,000 soon after the battle of Plassey : 'If any gentleman', said Clive, 'had privately asked me if that charge was true, I should have frankly acknowledged to him that I had received a large sum, but when I recollect the Nawab's Treasury at Moorshidabad, with heaps of gold and silver to the right and left, and these crowned with jewels'—striking his hand violently on his head—'by God! at this moment do I stand astonished at my own moderation?' "

FAVOURITES OF CLIVE

Thus, Clive was said to have taken only a paltry ten lakhs of rupees. Another writer states that "in the midst of immense fortunes suddenly acquired Lord Clive's stands the most conspicuous. He obtained from Meer Jaffer in 1757 a *Jagueer* (*Jaighir*) of about £30,000 per annum, exclusive of other immense presents."

Coming next to the shares of the friends and favourites of Clive, who were also allowed access to the Nawab's Treasury, Sumbhoo Chundher Mookerjee in his *Mookerjee's*

Magazine of 1861[?] describes the part played by Maharaja "Nubkissen" (Nabakrishna, the founder of the Sovabazar Raj family) and Dewan Ramchand, the founder of the Andul Raj.

NABAKRISHNA AND RAMCHAND

As to the early history of these two men, when eight young Englishmen for the East India Company's Civil Service arrived in Calcutta in 1750, Nabakrishna was appointed Persian *Munshi* for one of them, Warren Hastings, on a salary of Rs. 60 a month. Hastings was sent to the Cossimbazar Factory in 1753 and Nabakrishna accompanied him there. As for Ramchand, he was at first a "writer" (clerk) on Rs. 60 a month and later became Dewan to Governor Vansittart. Remembering these facts, the reader may be astonished to learn that Nabakrishna was reputed later to have spent nine lakhs of rupees on his mother's *sradh* ceremony, and Ramchand at his death was stated to have left one and a quarter crores of rupees.

Later, Nabakrishna was appointed Political Dewan to the Company, and through the influence of Clive got the title of Maharaja in 1766. He gave Hastings a loan of three lakhs of rupees, which was never repaid. According to Lord Thurlow, "he only stood inferior in point of emoluments or political consequence to Md. Reza Khan."

RESTITUTION MONEY

"To show his gratitude for his elevation to the *Subah*, Mir Jaffar made generous gifts to his benefactors, Clive and the English Company", writes A. K. Ray in his *Short History of Calcutta*. "Not only did he give them the *Zemin-dari* of the 24 Perganas, but he also paid some money for

the sack of Calcutta by Seraj-ud-dowla..... The restitution money went largely into the pockets of the European inhabitants of Calcutta..... A Commission was appointed to apportion a part of the balance of the restitution money among the native sufferers."

AN ACCOUNT

The accounts, taken from the East India Company's Consultations, dated the 18th September, 1758, may be given as follows :—

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Gobindram and Rogoometre | Rs. 3,75,000 |
| Sovaram Bysack | „ 3,75,000 |
| Ally Boye | „ 17,000 |
| Rutto Sircar | „ 1,40,000 |
| Sookdeb Mullick | „ 40,000 |
| Nian Mullick | „ 38,000 |
| Diaram Bose | „ 4,000 |
| Nilmoney | „ 18,000 |
| Hurri Kissen Tagoor | „ 10,000 |
| Durgaram Dutt | „ 5,000 |
| Ramsantose | „ 5,500 |
| Mahmud Suddock | „ 2,715 |
| Ayin Noady (probably Ainuddy)— | nil |
| <hr/> | |
| Total—Rs. | 10,25,762 |

A UNIQUE PAYMENT

A study of the list (an abstract of 13 Native Commissioners) reveals that with the exception of the three Mahomedans (one of whom, Ayin Noady, appears to have received nothing), all the rest were Hindus of the Kayastha, or "Banik", caste, with one "Pirali" Brahmin, *viz*, Hurri Kissen Tagoor. The clan-names of two (Nilmoney and Ramsantose) are not recorded.

There is also a second account in A. K. Ray's book, according to which a sum of Rs. 56,170 was distributed among 25 persons allied to the thirteen Native Commissioners.

What makes this payment of the restitution money unique in the annals of Calcutta is that the entire sum of one crore and seventy lakhs was sent down from Murshidabad in cold cash, in the shape of silver coins. The weight of the consignment was, therefore, over 5,000 maunds, or something like 200 tons of silver and it is no wonder that it took 27 boats to bring down by river to Calcutta.

"BLACK ZEMINDAR"

Gobindram Mitra was a prominent figure in Calcutta in the 18th Century and was known as the "Black Zemindar." The Zemindar, or Collector of Calcutta, was an Englishman, whose duty was to collect and administer the revenues of Calcutta derived from rents, tolls, fees, etc., and he had an Indian assistant, who was called the Black Zemindar. Gobindram built a *Kali* Temple in Baghbazar, crowned with a cupola rising to a height greater than the Ochterlony Monument, at an enormous cost. The temple was destroyed in a cyclone in 1737.

Sobharam Bysack was a very opulent merchant of Sutanati. Rutto (or Ratan) Sircar was a *dhoby* by caste. When the first British ship, the "Falcon", anchored off Garden Reach, Captain Stafford asked for a *dobhasi* (interpreter) but the request was misunderstood and Ratan *dhoba* was brought to him. Being a very intelligent man, he took up the job and acted as intermediary, becoming very rich in time.

SOURCES OF EARNING

I have just narrated some instances of huge financial transactions involving *crores* and *lakhs* of rupees, which either took place in Calcutta or concerned Calcutta people. I have also described how, after the fall of Seraj-ud-dowla

in 1757 and the gradual assumption of ruling power by the East India Company, the opportunities for "making money",—either by fair means or foul,—were enormous, and how the English merchants and adventurers, along with their Indian *Banians*, *Dewans*, underlings, satellites and favourites took the fullest advantage of these opportunities to acquire immense fortunes. If we turn to another aspect and look into the comparatively legitimate sources of earning, such as, by service, trades, or professions (principally law and medicine), we still find that even in these lines, in the earlier days of Calcutta, there were golden opportunities of making fortunes. Generally speaking, those who served under the East India Company, whether Englishmen or Indian, through their connections with powerful Englishmen at the top, could find various and devious ways of earning money in "side-lines", i. e., openings of which they took advantage by reason of their position.

GREAT NATIVE FAMILIES

Dr. Martin in his book on the "Medical Topography of Calcutta" (published in 1837) quotes William Hamilton as saying :—

"The great Native families, who now contribute to the splendour of Calcutta, are of very recent origin. Indeed, scarcely ten could be named who possessed wealth before the rise of the English power, it having been accumulated under our sovereignty, chiefly in our service, and entirely through our protection."

"CITY OF SHOP-KEEPERS"

This statement is taken forward a step farther by Sumbho Chunder Mookerjee, who in his *Mookerjee's Magazine* (1861) writes :—

"Calcutta in the 18th Century was a new city without time-honoured tradition. No high families,

no individuals believed to have descended from the sun or moon settled there. Napoleon ridiculed the English as a Nation of shop-keepers. It would not be untrue to describe Calcutta as a city of shop-keepers. The most respectable of its inhabitants were merchants."

CALCUTTA'S ELITE

Taking these two statements together, it is evident that the foundations of the great Calcutta houses, or families, who now form the *elite*, or cream, of Calcutta Society by reason of their wealth, were mostly laid during these early days of Calcutta. The money amassed by their fore-fathers through their connection with the English in various capacities, mostly by illegitimate or questionable methods, was in many cases largely invested in Calcutta land or house-property, when these were cheap, and the benefits are now being reaped by their descendants."

ENGLISH OFFICIALS

Coming to particulars, I will first describe a class of highly paid English Officials under the East India Company, about whom the ordinary layman knows very little. They were called "Commercial Residents", and were posted at different trading centres, such as, Malda, Cossimbazar, Rungpore, Santipur, Patna, etc. Their functions are thus described in the *East India Voyager*, published in London in 1849 :—

"These officers superintended the advances made to the cultivators of cotton and persons employed in the production of silk, and in due season received the produce and remitted it to Calcutta. The work was most easy and the labour little.....He had a fine mansion allowed him, had little trouble in going about to visit his district, and his business was confined to looking over accounts, signing papers and adjusting petty differences between cultivators, while

the real details of the office were conducted by his head officer, or Dewan.....Consequently, these offices with much pay and little work were prizes given to individuals, who had good interest, and in this line were made many of those large and princely fortunes which used to astound the people of England."

INDIAN DEWANS

This gives us a clue to the "large and princely fortunes" made by Indians as well, who served as Dewans under these "Residents", or as Dewans of salt *golahs*, opium factories and similar lucrative appointments where they, also with their English masters, had large opportunities of making money. We occasionally come across mentions of the larger fortunes amassed by Indians in those days, in the pages of contemporary newspapers. In a news-item, published in September, 1818, recording the death of Baboo Gopee Mohun Tagore, it is stated that he "left a fortune of eighty *lakhs* of rupees." The *Calcutta Gazette* of the 12th April, 1792, reports the death of "Cossinaut Baboo" (Dewan Kashinath Mitra, who built a *ghat* on the Ganges, which is still known as Kasi Mitter's *ghat*) and states that "Cossinaut Baboo is said to have died worth upwards of sixty *lakhs* of rupees, which by his Will he has divided among his four sons."

OFFICIALS' SALARIES

Let us now examine what sort of salaries were paid to the higher officials under the East India Company's Government in its earliest days. With the appointment of Warren Hastings as Governor-General, four Englishmen, *viz.*, Sir Philip Francis, Richard Barwell, Colonel Monson and General Clavering, were appointed Members of the Supreme Council, each of whom received a salary of over Rs. 8,000 a

month. At the same time (1774) a Supreme Court was established in Calcutta, with the Chief Justice (Sir Elijah Impey) on a salary of Rs. 80,000 a year, and three Puisne Judges (Chambers, Hyde and Le Maistre) on Rs. 60,000 a year each. In a letter written a few years later to a friend, Sir Elijah Impey complained because he had been unable, after five years of service, to save "more than £3,000 in any year".

A CALCUTTA SCANDAL

Historian Busteed mentions that a relative of Impey's, named Frazer, who held office as Sealer of the Supreme Court, was given a lucrative contract for "pool-bundy", *i. e.*, keeping bridges and embankments in repair, and "Calcutta scandal alleged that the real contractor was the Chief Justice himself". Hickey in his *Bengal Gazette*, writes :—"A displaced civilian, asking his friend the other day, what were the readiest means of procuring a lucrative appointment, was answered :—'Pay your constant devoirs to Marian Allypore, or sell yourself soul and body to Poolbundy'.

[Hicky's *Gazette* was an extremely scurrilous publication which spared nobody in Calcutta. Hicky was once hauled up before the Supreme Court for publishing libellous statements against the Governor-General, Warren Hastings, and was heavily fined. This, however, did not stop his vilifying propensities, and he had coined nicknames for all prominent Englishmen in Calcutta under such thin disguises that there was no difficulty in identifying them. 'Marian Allypore' was Marian, the second wife of Warren Hastings, who lived in Hastings House, Alipore, while 'Poolbundy' referred to the Chief Justice, Sir Elijah Impey, for his connection with the contract for 'poolbundy' mentioned above.]

MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

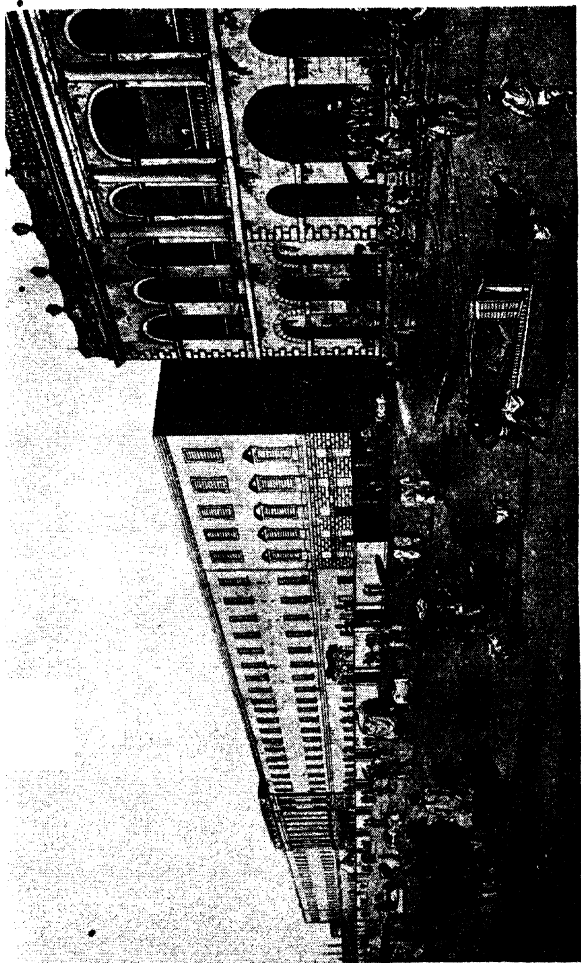
Coming forward to the mid-nineteenth Century period, some of the salaries (in 1841) paid to Judges, etc., were as follows :—The Commander-in-Chief and each of the four Members of the Supreme Council—Rs. 8,860 per month ; the Puisne Judges,—each Rs 5,209-3-0 per month ; Advocate-General—Rs. 6,945-9-6 per month ; Judge of the Sudder Adawlut—Rs. 4,789-9-4 per month. It may be mentioned here that the first Advocate-General was Sir John Day, who was appointed in 1778 on a salary of £3,000 a year. (The broken amounts are due to the fact that these superior appointments were made in England with salaries in English pounds, whose value fluctuated in connection with the rupee. The reader may take ten rupees as the value of the English “pound” sovereign).

As regards Judges, etc., in the Mofussil, the following interesting account is taken from the *Memoirs of Young Civilian in Bengal in 1805*:—

“The salary of a Judge and a Magistrate is in no *Zillah* less than Rs. 24,000 per annum... The salaries of all Collectors are the same, *viz.*, Rs. 1,500 per month, but some Collectorships are better than others, because there is an authorised percentage drawn by these officers on the sale of Stamp Paper and on Licenses for selling intoxicating drugs and liquors, the consumption of which, of course, varies in different *Zillahs*. The Collectorship of Benares, for instance, is by these means worth upwards of 40,000 rupees a year... The Senior Judge of a Court of Appeal and Circuit gets Rs. 45,000, the second Rs. 40,000 and the third Rs. 30,000 a year.”

RECOMMENDATION AND PATRONAGE

I will now give an instance of the manner in which Englishmen were provided for by those in authority. An



Right—the old Mayor's Court, built in 1727 and demolished in 1792,
(The present St. Andrew's Church (built in 1815) stands on its site.)

Left—the Writers' Buildings, built in 1776.

(From an engraving by T. Daniell—1786)

Englishman, named Charles William Blunt (later Sir), came out to India in 1783, at the age of 53. We find Barywell recommending him to Hastings for a "writership", as having run through his fortune and deserving patronage for the sake of his three sons and eight daughters. Hastings gave him the post of Agent for the supply of army bullocks, and he obtained, in addition, a share in the Post Office. Both these ventures succeeded so well, we are informed, that he is said to have died (in 1802) worth £100,000.

CLERGYMEN'S INCOME

Even the clergymen serving under the Company as Chaplains, etc., were not free from the universal tendency to do a little business "on the side" to augment their income. In Dr. Hyde's account of the *Parish of Bengal* we find that "about 1776, the salaries of the clergy were increased from Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,200 a month. Church fees must have been very lucrative, because the Chaplains obtained leave to send home upto £1,000 a year each through the Company's bills." We also read:—

"That was the period of the much criticised Salt, Betel, and Tobacco monopoly sanctioned by Clive. If Mr. Bolt's *Considerations on Indian Affairs* be correct, the Chaplain, Mr. Parry's two-thirds share must have produced a profit of over £2,800 the first year, and over £2,200 the next."

PROFITABLE LEGAL PROFESSION

Coming next to the legal profession in Calcutta, there is no doubt that those, who practised it in those early days, found it very profitable. Going through Mr. H. E. A. Cotton's *Memories of the Supreme Court, 1774—1862*, we constantly come across the expression "retired with a fortune"

until it becomes monotonous. Samuel Tolfrey, for example, was an Attorney, who took office as Under-Sheriff to Macrabie in 1775. Hicky's *Bengal Gazette* of the 2nd December, 1790, says:—"Samuel Tolfrey, Esq., has embarked for Europe with a fortune of three *lakhs* of rupees." The name of Thomas Farrer stands first on the roll of advocates of the Supreme Court, where he was admitted on the opening day, October 22, 1774. Hicky writes: "His most sanguine hopes were soon realised by his acquiring a noble fortune",—no less a sum in fact than £60,000 (six *lakhs* of rupees) in the space of four years. Miss Sophia Goldbourne, writing in *Hartley House* (published in 1789), says:—

"No wonder lawyers return from this country rolling in wealth : their fees are enormous. If you ask a single question on any affair, you pay down your Gold Mohur (two pounds); and if he writes a letter of only three lines, twenty-eight rupees (four pounds)...The fee for making a Will is in proportion to its length, from five Gold Mohurs upwards.....A man of abilities and good address in this line, if he has the firmness to resist the fashionable contagion, gambling, need only pass one seven years of his life in Calcutta, to return home in affluent circumstances."

AN EXAMPLE

William Burroughs was enrolled as an Advocate of the Supreme Court on November 10, 1789. He was an English Barrister, and began life in Calcutta by hiring "a wretched little hovel in a narrow, dirty back lane, furnishing it with a bed and a few chairs and table", but his practice rapidly grew, and Hicky "lived to see this very man the most ostentatious and in some instances the most expensive man in Bengal". He was appointed Standing Counsel in 1790, Advocate-General in 1792, and returned to England in 1800.

EARNINGS OF A DOCTOR

Leaving the legal profession and coming to the Medical, Dr. Rowland Jackson was a well-known Doctor in Calcutta in the latter end of the 18th Century. He had studied Medicine and Natural Science at many European Universities, including that of Paris. He was appointed to attend the East India Company's Servants on a salary of Rs. 600 a month plus Rs. 200 as house-allowance. Regarding doctors at this period, Sophia Goldbourne says :—

“Doctors visit in palanquins and charge one Gold Mohur a visit. The extras are enormous, such as, a Bolus, one rupee ; an ounce of salts, ditto ; an ounce of bark, three rupees ; such a lot of these commodities have to be swallowed, that literally speaking you may ruin your fortune to preserve your health”.

MEDICAL COLLEGE

Coming to the mid-nineteenth Century period, we find that in 1835, when the Medical College was established, its first Superintendent was Assistant Surgeon A. J. Bramley, appointed on a salary of Rs. 1,200 a month, in addition to the regimental pay and allowance of his rank (which could not have been less than three to four hundred rupees). In sad contrast to this, the “Native Doctors” in charge of small hospitals in Calcutta began on the miserable pay of Rs. 20 a month. The first four Bengali students, who passed out of the Medical College as fully qualified Doctors* in 1839, were strongly eulogised for having risen superior to the trammels of prejudice and obstacles of no mean character, and passed through an ordeal of no common kind, and were recom-

* Their names were Uma Charan Sett, Dwarkanath Gupta, Rajkristo Dey and Nobin Chandra Mitra. A fifth student, named Syama Charan Dutt, was declared to have passed later.

mended to be taken into Government service, but their starting salary was the magnificent sum of one hundred rupees a month.

TRADES AND OTHER PROFESSIONS

As regards trades and professions besides law and medicine, we find that in 18th Century Calcutta, Englishmen carried on many trades which they do no longer. The names and callings of European residents of Calcutta liable to serve as Jurymen are found in the Sheriff's records, from which we find that they carried on such varied and diverse trades, as coach-maker, watch-maker, tavern-keeper, livery stable-keeper, tailor, horse-jockey, portrait-painter, wine-dealer, carpenter, shoe-maker, carver and gilder, school-master, dancing-master, dentist, tanner, house-builder, hair-dresser, undertaker, etc. Records of earnings at these trades can hardly be found, but one instance may be quoted. Mr. Oldham was the first undertaker to settle in Calcutta. Before his time, tombstones used to be imported from Madras and Mr. Oldham cut stones brought from the ruins of Gour, the ancient capital of Bengal. "It goes without saying," writes Busteed, "that Mr. Oldham amassed a fortune before he himself was laid, in 1788, in the Park Street cemetery, surrounded by numerous specimens of his own handicraft".

FOOD PRICES

The city of Calcutta is now over two and a half Centuries old, and it is very difficult to obtain information as to the prices of foodstuffs in Calcutta farther back than the early days of the 19th Century, or, at most, the latter end of the 18th Century. The *Calcutta Gazette*, the official newspaper of the East India Company, started in 1784,

hardly ever furnishes this kind of information, but there are a few other sources available, from which we can obtain occasional statements concerning the prices of foodstuffs in Calcutta in the past. There are published collections of letters of contemporary people, as well as diaries kept by people, who conscientiously entered every minute detail of their daily lives in them. The diary-keeping habit is now-a-days looked down upon as a "Victorian,"—and therefore, an obsolete and out-of-date,—habit, but students of history have had good reason to bless these diarists and letter-writers.

MRS. FAY'S 'LETTERS'

An English lady, named Mrs. Fay, came to Calcutta towards the latter end of the 18th Century, and her published collection of letters, those which she wrote during her stay in Calcutta, are full of interesting and illuminating gossip regarding life in this city at that period. We are indebted to Mrs. Fay for the first information regarding prices of foodstuffs in Calcutta, and it will, therefore, not be out of place here to give the reader a brief account of this lady. She started from England in 1779 in the company of her husband, Anthony Fay, who was a Barrister-at-Law and who intended to start practising in Calcutta. After an adventurous journey across Europe, Egypt, etc., they reached Calicut, where they fell into the hands of Sudder Khan, an officer under Haider Ali, and were thrown into prison. They were released after spending 15 weeks in prison, and they succeeded in reaching Calcutta in May, 1780. Mrs. Fay remained here for three years, went back to England, from there to America, and later made three voyages back to India. She died in Calcutta in 1815. While in Calcutta she carried on the business of a

dress-maker, and occupied the house now standing at the junction of Church Lane and Hastings Street.

EATABLES VERY CHEAP

I will now give an extract from one of her letters written in 1780, from which we gather some information regarding prices of certain foodstuffs in Calcutta at the time :—

“We dine at two o'clock, in the very heat of the day. I will give you our bill of fare and the general price of things. A soup, a roast fowl, curry and rice, a mutton pie, a fore-quarter of lamb, a rice pudding, tarts, very good cheese, fresh churned butter, excellent Madeira (that is expensive, but eatables are very cheap). A whole sheep costs but two rupees, a lamb one rupee, six good fowls or ducks ditto, twelve pounds of bread ditto, two pounds of butter ditto, good cheese two months ago sold at the enormous price of two or three rupees per pound, but now you may buy it for one and a half. English claret sells at this time for sixty rupees a dozen.”

SOPHIA GOLDBOURNE'S LETTERS

There is another collection of letters written from Calcutta by a mythical young English lady, named Sophia Goldbourne, published under the name of *Hartley House* in 1789, from which also we obtain information similar to that quoted above. A short extract will suffice :—

“From the high demand at the taverns and coffee-houses you may conclude that provisions are brought to market at a high price ; on the contrary...six fine ducks are sold for a rupee (two for six pence) ; bread is also good and cheap ; likewise fowls ; eggs and milk very cheap ; butter dear ; geese cheap ; turkies dear ; and half a sheep is often bought for one rupee. Vegetables are plentiful and very fine..... fruit of every kind is delightful,—oranges, limes, lemons, bananas, pommaloes, plantains, etc.”

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Going forward into the 19th Century we come across a fully detailed list of prices of foodstuffs in Calcutta in an issue of the *Calcutta Gazette* of the year 1817, and I make no apologies for quoting this list *in extenso*. Several kinds of commodities are classified in this list as "1st sort", "2nd sort", and so on, according to quality, and for considerations of space I shall give only the range of prices against such articles :—

Per rupee—

Wheat—30 seers ; Flour—12 seers ; Butter—12 to 34 chittacks ; Cow ghee—30 to 38 chittacks ; Buffalo ghee—32 chittacks ; Cheese—8 to 16 chittacks ; Sugar—4 to 6 seers ; Milk—14 seers ; Salt—10 seers ; Patna gram (*boot*)—18 to 22 seers ; Rice—11 to 44 seers.

Per maund—

Biscuits—4 to 6 rupees ; Potatoes—2 to 4 rupees ; Country oil—Rs. 8-12-0 ; Cocoanut oil—Rs. 13-8-0.

Per pair—

Geese—Rs. 1-12-0 to Rs. 2-8-0 ; Ducks—Rs. 3 ; Pigeons—Annas three ; Rabbits—Rs. 1-12-0 ; Chittagong fowls—Rs. 1-4-0 to Rs. 1-12-0 ; Fowls—3 to 10 per rupee ; Kids—Each As. 12 to one rupee ; Mutton—Per quarter one rupee ; Eggs—As. 5 per corgé.

Fish, per seer—

Rowe (Rohi) and Cutlah—4 to 5 annas ; Bectie (Vetki)—5 annas ; Quoye (Koi) and Sowle (Shole)—2 annas ; Tangrah and Chunnah—1 to 1½ annas ; Mango fish—16 per rupee.

Vegetables, per rupee—

Salad—24 bundles ; Turnips—9 bundles ; Carrots—17 bundles ; Celery—15 bundles ; Limes—350.

Firewood—

Soondry logs—Rs. 14 per 100 mds ; Split
Soondry—5½ maunds per rupee.

VARIETIES OF RICE

Commenting on the above list, it appears that the price of “mango fish” does not seem to have changed much through the years that have passed ; also it is to be noted that wood-fuel was used for the domestic fire, for cooking, and not coke. The list gives nearly a dozen different varieties of rice from “1st sort, fine table Patna rice” at 11 seers per rupee, to medium and coarse varieties selling up to 44 seers per rupee. That is to say, the prices ranged from less than a rupee per maund to just under four rupees per maund for the finest quality. Rohi and Cutlah fish sold for 4 to 5 annas per seer, while the smaller varieties sold at prices ranging from 1 to 3 annas. Eggs, we find, were sold at 5 annas per “corge”—a term the meaning of which, I confess, I am not sure of. It probably means a score (20) in which case the price works out at one pice each. “Country” oil is quoted at Rs. 8-12-0 per maund and evidently means mustard oil. Fruits and vegetables were certainly cheap though the prices of the latter are given in “bundles” and we have Miss Sophia Goldbourne’s confession that they were “excellent.”

THEN AND NOW

Coming now to more recent times, in my boyhood days, during the “Nineties”, or the last decade of the 19th Century, so far as my memory serves, fine rice was obtainable at about four to five rupees a maund, Rohi fish at six to eight annas per seer, milk at 6 or 7 seers per rupee, sugar, flour and *atta* ranged between two and three annas per seer. Now-a-days, alas, one has to count every pice before spending it

and still the money flies. In fact, it flies at aeroplane speed and yet in return for the outlay, one hardly gets sufficient for a decent meal.

IMPORTED PROVISIONS

I shall now quote from some advertisements taken from different issues of the *Calcutta Gazette*, regarding imported provisions and stores, etc., from which a fair idea of the prevailing prices for this class of goods may be obtained (the names of the firms, such as, H. Davies of Tank Square, Henry Cavendish, etc., are omitted) :—

| | | | Rs. | As. | P. |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| Best Durham Mustard 1 lb. bottle | ... | | 2 | 0 | 0. |
| Vinegar, quart bottle | ... | ... | 1 | 4 | 0. |
| Sallad oil, per bottle | ... | ... | 2 | 0 | 0. |
| Sauces, per bottle | ... | ... | 2 | 0 | 0. |
| Pickled oysters, per bottle | ... | ... | 8 | 0 | 0. |
| Best wax candles, per maund | ... | | 80 | 0 | 0. |
| Jams (raspberry, strawberry, black currants) in 6 lb. jars | ... | | 24 | 0 | 0. |
| Marmalade and preserves, per jar | ... | | 12 | 0 | 0. |
| Comfits in ground-glass stoppered bottles, per bottle | ... | ... | 8 | 0 | 0. |
| Mince meat in 3 lb. jars | ... | ... | 12 | 0 | 0. |
| Rum <i>shrub</i> and raspberry Vinegar, per dozen | ... | ... | 32 | 0 | 0. |

SODA WATER

Soda water was an expensive luxury in those days and was imported from England in stoneware bottles. We do not hear of its being manufactured here until 1816. Even then the price was high, as will appear from the following advertisements :—

(1) For Sale—Soda water from Schweppe & Co.—Jas. Tayylor & Co., have for sale a small

quantity of soda water in stone quarts and pints, imported on the "Lord Keith."

(2) Schweppe's soda water, rupees ten per dozen. Messrs. Hy. Mathews & Co., 7, Old Court House Street.

(3) Soda water for the hot weather :—Prepared daily under the immediate inspection of C. Hodgkinson, Chemist, No. 11, Pollock Street. In stone bottles at rupees nine per dozen ready money (Dated, April 4, 1816)

MANILA CIGARS

I will now quote an advertisement from the *Calcutta Gazette*, March 14, 1822, regarding imported cigars :—

Real Manila Segars or Cheroots—(Sovereign remedy against fevers and damps) Imported on the "Investigator." To be had at 201, Old China Bazar, near the Armenian Church, at one rupee per bundle.

One wonders how many "real manila" cigars went to a bundle at one rupee a bundle? The line descriptive of their beneficial qualities is also worthy of note.

OLD CALCUTTA CAMEOS



PLAYS

AND

PLAYHOUSES

English Theatres

The *First* English Theatre at Calcutta was opened at Lalbazar about 1745.

The *Second*, "Calcutta Theatre" was established in 1775.

The *third* was set up in 1795 by a Russian gentleman at the modern Ezra Street locality, where English plays, as well as Bengali translations of English plays with Bengali actors and actresses, were produced.

The *fourth* rose in 1797 at the present Government Place North.

The *fifth*, "the Athenaeum", was situated in Circular Road about the same time as that of the fourth.

The *sixth*, "Chowringhee Theatre", was started at the corner of Chowringhee and modern Theatre Road in 1813.

The *seventh*, "Boitaconnah Theatre," was opened in 1827.

The *eighth*, "Calcutta Theatre" (No. II) was established at the site of the present Ezra Mansions in 1836.

The *ninth*, "Sans Souci", was opened in 1831 on Park Street.

Other theatres, that came into existence after "Sans Souci" but were short lived, were these : "Van Golder's Lyric Theatre," "the Lyceum," "Lewis Theatre Royal", and finally, the "Opera House", which later became the "Grand Opera House".

FROM 1690, WHEN JOB CHARNOCK LAID THE FIRST foundations of the City of Calcutta, until about the middle of the 18th Century, the inhabitants of Calcutta, both European and Indian, found no time for the cultivation of the finer arts, especially the arts of Thalia and Melpomene, the Muses of Comedy and Tragedy (out of the Nine Muses of Greek mythology). The English "settlers" were immersed in their commercial interests, shaking the "gold mohur tree" and also carrying on with the responsibilities of governance. The sole aim of most of them seems to have been to amass a fortune as quickly as possible and then to leave the shores of India.

FIRST ENGLISH PLAYHOUSE

Yet, during the same period in England a great revival of Art, Literature and Drama had been taking place. While the First Folio of the plays of William Shakespeare was published in 1623, it was not until nearly a Century and a half had passed that the first English Playhouse, or Theatre, was opened in Calcutta (about 1745) at Lalbazar, at the corner of the Rope Walk (now Mission Row). Lalbazar was at this period the centre for places of fashionable entertainment, such as, taverns, assembly rooms for holding dancing and other parties, etc. Nothing much is known about this Playhouse except that the players were all amateurs. Calcutta was besieged and attacked in 1756 by Siraj-ud-dowla's army, and this Playhouse formed one of the British outposts, which was carried and occupied by the invading army. Calcutta was retaken by Clive in the next year, and it is not definitely known whether this Playhouse continued to function after the retaking of Calcutta. It is on record, however, that the

great English actor, David Garrick, evinced much interest in this venture, and we find that in the year 1772, a present of "two pipes of Madeira" was sent to him in token of the trouble he had taken to promote the attempt.

"CALCUTTA THEATRE"

We come next to the New Playhouse (or "Calcutta Theatre") situated at the corner of present-day Clive Street and Lyons Range, opened in 1775. It was stated to have cost a *lakh* of rupees, raised by subscription—shares of Rs. 100 each. Liberal contributions were received from the Governor-General, Warren Hastings, as well as from Richard Barwell, General Monson, Sir Elijah Impey, etc. Garrick again took interest in the new venture, and it is said that the original scenery was sent out from London under the supervision of the great actor himself. He also sent an English actor, named Bernard Messinck, to help in establishing the new Playhouse.

A LADY OF THE STAGE

It is known that the actors in this Theatre were all men, though later the wife of a senior Calcutta merchant, Mrs. Bristow, appeared occasionally on the stage, which set the fashion of ladies taking part in some productions. Mrs. Bristow was an enthusiastic amateur actress and had a private theatre in her house in Chowringhee, and herself took leading parts in the plays produced there.

PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

Among the plays produced at the New Playhouse may be mentioned :—Rowe's *Fair Penitent*, *Zara*, *Venice Preserved*, *the Critic*, *the Way to Keep Him*, and of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III*. Among comedies

and farces, played here, were *Bon Ton*, *Who is Dupe?*, *She Would and She Wouldn't*, *the Absent Man*, *Inkle and Yarico*, and one bearing the peculiar name of *Chrononhotonthologos*. Tickets of admission were priced at one Gold Mohur for a box, 12 *sicca* rupees for pit and 6 *sicca* rupees for gallery seats (apparently there were no "stalls").

Later on, the financial affairs of the Theatre got involved and in 1808 it was sold to Gopi Mohan Tagore, who started a Bazar there (New China Bazar).

LEBEDEFF'S THEATRE

In the meantime a Russian, named Herassim Lebedeff, who had a chequered career, had arrived in Calcutta. He devoted himself to learning Sanskrit, Hindi and Bengali, and was said to have attained good command over the Bengali language. He opened a Theatre in 1795 at Doomtollah (modern Ezra Street locality), where English plays, as well as Bengali translations of English plays, with Bengali actors and actresses, were produced.

In 1797, another Theatre was opened at Wheler Place (the present Government Place North) and another, the "Athenaeum," at No. 18, Circular Road.

CHOWRINGHEE THEATRE

The next notable Playhouse to be started was the "Chowringhee Theatre", situated at the corner of Chowringhee and present-day Theatre Road. This was established on the strength of subscriptions, the Governor contributing liberally, and was opened on the 25th November, 1813. Among the actresses on this stage, the most prominent was Mrs. Esther Leach, and among the plays produced may be named Sheridan's *Rivals*, *Raising the Wind*, *Fortune's Frolics*, *Ella*

Rosenberg, All the World's a Stage, Ladoiska, Three Weeks after Marriage, the Agreeable Surprise, the Finger Post or Five Miles Off, Past Ten O'clock or a Rainy Night, the Upholsterer or What News?, etc. It seems to have been the fashion to have two alternate titles for many of the plays.

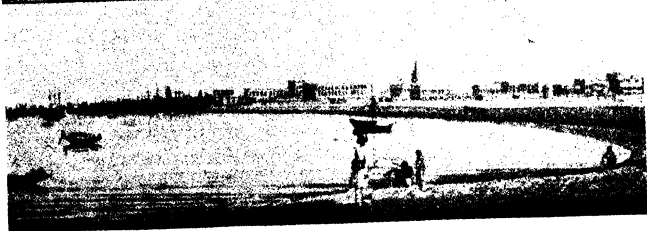
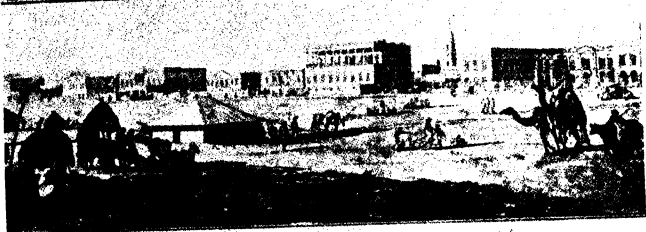
In the course of time the Theatre fell upon evil days and we find that in 1824, prices of admission were reduced, Box-seats being Rs. 8 each and Pit Rs. 6. The Theatre was totally destroyed by fire on the 31st May, 1839, and the land on which it had stood was purchased by "Prince" Dwarkanath Tagore (the grandfather of Rabindranath) for Rs. 15,000.

OTHER THEATRES

Among small theatres started about this time, which had very short spans of existence, may be mentioned: the "Boitaconnah Theatre" (1827) and a Theatre at Dum Dum. After the destruction of the "Chowringhee Theatre," Mrs. Leach started another, called the "Calcutta Theatre", at the corner of Government Place and Waterloo Street (where the present Ezra Mansions are situated) in 1836-40. This venture does not appear to have been very successful. The next notable Theatre was the "Sans Souci" in Park Street, built mainly by the enterprise of Mr. Stocqueler of the *Englishman* newspaper, funds being raised by subscription among the European residents. The Governor-General, Lord Auckland, contributed Rs. 1,000. It was opened by Mrs. Leach on 8th March, 1841, with James Sheridan Knowle's play, *the Wife*.

ACTORS AND ACTRESSES

The actors were a mixture of amateurs and professionals, of whom the latter were occasionally imported from London.



1. OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE—1788
(From T. and W. Daniell's 'Coloured Views')
2. OLD FORT WILLIAM—1787
3. ESPLANADE ROW—1788
4. GENERAL VIEW OF THE ESPLANADE

Among the amateurs, the most noble were Mr. H. W. Torrens, a versatile Bengal civilian, and his son-in-law, Mr. James Hume, who was a Barrister and later became Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta. On the 2nd November, 1843, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* was produced, in which a talented English actor, named James Vining, appeared as Shylock before a full house. This was followed by *The Handsome Husband* in which Mrs. Leach was appearing as Mrs. Wyndham. As she was standing at the side of the stage awaiting her cue, one of a row of oil-lamps on the floor set her dress on fire, and she was badly burnt. She was carried into her house (the present Palace of the Roman Catholic Archbishop in Park Street) but died 16 days later, at the early age of 34. Whether as the result of this tragedy or owing to commercial failure, the house continued a precarious existence for some time, being leased out to different companies for occasional performances.

A BENGALIEE 'OTHELLO'

I may mention here a notable event which took place on this stage in 1848, namely, the appearance of a Bengalee amateur actor in an English Company and in an English play *viz.*, Shakespeare's *Othello*. Considering the age and the times, it was a remarkable achievement. The actor was Babu Baisnab Charan Addy, who appeared as "Othello" for two nights only with splendid success.

Shortly after this, the Theatre was sold to Archbishop Carew, and a College was established there by the Jesuit Fathers named first St. John's and later St. Xavier's College.

During this period, *i.e.*, round about the middle of the 19th Century, English education had made great strides among the Bengalee inhabitants of Calcutta, and we find

frequent references to the staging of Shakespeare's plays by ambitious amateurs. It is recorded that in 1837 a performance of the *Merchant of Venice* was given by the students of the Hindu College at Government House, before the Governor, Lord Auckland. There were many similar private performances at this period given whenever and wherever suitable.

"GRAND OPERA HOUSE"

During the next few years after the abolition of the "Sans Souci Theatre", several Theatres came into existence but were generally short-lived, such as, "Van Golder's Lyric Theatre" (1857), "the Lyceum" on the *Maidan*, "Lewis Theatre Royal", and finally the "Opera House" or "the English Theatre". The last named became later the "Grand Opera House" and is still in existence but as a Cinema House, named "The Globe Theatre." It was here that in 1876 the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) was entertained during his visit to Calcutta, and the prices paid for admission on that occasion were the highest on record, *viz.*, for upper tier boxes Rs. 1,000; lower tier boxes Rs. 500 and stalls Rs. 30 each.

THE PRESENT TIMES

This brings us down to the modern times, there being at present no English Theatre in Calcutta, the all-pervading Cinema having established itself in all the houses previously devoted to the "legitimate" stage. Occasional stage plays are given now-a-days on the boards of any of these houses that may be available.

I will conclude by mentioning that the "Empire Theatre" (now used for Cinema shows, and called the First Empire

to distinguish it from the New Empire Cinema House) was opened in 1909 and has many associations with the English and the Continental stage. On its boards at different times have appeared Harry Lauder, the English Comedian ; Anna Pavlova, the world-famous danseuse ; Marie Tempest, the great English actress ; Matheson Lang, the great actor and his wife (whose stage name was Miss Hutin Britton), who produced several of Shakespeare's plays on the stage, notably *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *the Merchant of Venice*. The boards of this house have also resounded to the strains of the Violin played by such masters as, Jascha Heifetz and Jan Kubelik, or the Piano played by Moisewitsch. The glorious voice of Dame Clara Butt has also been heard here, and it was here that as a frightened amateur, Merle Oberon, stared across the footlights. She has since made a name as a Film actress both in England and in America and is now the wife of the famous Director, Sir Alexander Korda.

Bengali Theatres

The first Bengali plays were produced at Lebedeff's (a Russian) theatre.

Then, the Bengali students, and next amateur gentlemen, took roles in the English plays.

The first Bengali amateur stage was set up in 1855 at Shambazar. At this time dramatic clubs sprang up here and there all over the town.

The "Belgachia Theatre" was established in 1858 ; other contemporary theatre clubs were in the main : "Pathuriaghata Banga Natyalaya", "Sovabazar Private Theatrical Society", "Bowbazar Club" and "Baghbazar Amateur Theatre." With the last named club was connected Girish Ghosh and Ardhendu Mustaffi.

The first Bengali public theatre was called, the "National Theatre", established in 1872; the next was the "Hindu National Theatre", which changed its name in 1873 into the "Great National." In the same year was born the first permanent home of the Bengali Theatre on the site of the present "Minerva Theatre." They were followed by the founding of the "Emerald" and "Star" Theatres.

In 1873 the "Bengal Theatre" was started; it was renamed as the "Royal Bengal Theatre" in 1890.

The "Star" and the "Minerva" Theatres held undisputed sway for more than 30 years and we then come to the modern times.

IT IS AGREED AMONG HISTORIANS THAT THE FIRST Bengali plays produced in Calcutta were under the auspices of a Russian adventurer, named Herassim Lebedeff, or Lebedoff, who arrived in Calcutta in 1787, after a varied and chequered career in different parts of the world. Here, he engaged a Pundit, named 'Gokulnath Dash', to teach him Sanskrit, Hindi and Bengali, and it is said that he became quite proficient in Bengali. He started a theatre in 1795, in 'Doomtollah' (the modern Ezra Street locality) where he produced two English plays (*Disguise* and *Love is the Best Doctor*) translated into Bengali and acted by Bengali actors and actresses. The *Disguise* was first performed on the 27th November, 1793, and repeated on the 21 March, 1796, with great success.

PRIVATE PERFORMANCES

This was, however, merely a passing venture, and the real inception of the Bengali stage began much later, during the early forties of the 19th Century. English education had by that time made great strides among the Bengali inhabitants of Calcutta and private performances on the lines of the English stage were occasionally being held in the houses of Zemindars, Rajas and other wealthy and influential people, to which the elite of the town were invited. The only materials available for staging at this period were translations of the old Sanskrit dramas, but they could hardly make any headway because "the European ideal, which had brought in something new and strangely appealing, set at defiance the old-world dramatic canons of Biswanath Kabiraj and broke the new ground of an entirely unexplored world".

OTHER EXPERIMENTS

Two professors, Captain D. L. Richardson, Professor of English in the Hindu College, and Hermann Jeffroy, a retired Barrister and Professor at the Oriental Seminary, gave encouragement and help to the students to produce English plays. Students of the David Hare Academy performed Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar*.

Not content with these sporadic attempts, the students of the Oriental Seminary set up the "Town Theatre" and later on the "Oriental Theatre" in the school building itself (1853-55). Mr. Clinger of the "Sans Souci Theatre" in Park Street came as their Director, while an well-known English actress of the day, named Mrs. Grieg, also came and played 'Portia' in the *Merchant of Venice*. It was also at this period that the daring experiment was tried of taking a Bengali amateur actor to play on the English stage with an entirely English Company. Mr. Baisnab Charan Addy, an actor of repute, played the part of 'Othello' in Shakespeare's play, for two nights at the "Sans, Souci Theatre" in Park Street with great success (1848).

FIRST AMATEUR STAGE

The performance of English plays naturally gave rise to the desire to stage plays in Bengali. The first Bengali amateur stage was set up at Nabin Chandra Basu's house in Shambazar and the first play produced there was an adaptation of Bharat Chandra's *Vidyasundar* (1835). After this, many 'dramatic clubs' began to spring up, of which the more notable were the Charakdanga Club; the Simla Club at the house of Chhatu Babu (Ashutosh Dey), where Bengali versions of *Rukminiharan*, *Mulati Madhab*, *Sakuntala*, etc., were played; the Gouribha (or Garifa) Club in which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was performed with Keshub Sen in the

leading role and a club at Kaliprosunno Singha's house, in which Bengali translations of Vanabhatta's *Beni-Sanhar*, *Mahasweta*, *Vikramorbasi* and other Sanskrit dramas were produced. Kaliprosunno himself, as well as W. C. Bonnerjee, took leading parts in these plays.

FIRST ORIGINAL DRAMA

It was in 1854, that the first original drama written in Bengali,—*Kulin-Kula-Sarbaswa*,—by Pundit Ramnarayana Tarkalankar was produced at the house of Ramjoy Basak in Sibtola (the present Tagore Castle Road). Ramnarayan later wrote several other dramas (*Naba Natak*, etc.), and was disparagingly called 'Natukay Naran' by his contemporaries.

BELGACHIA THEATRE

The "Belgachia Theatre" was established in 1858 at the garden house of Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore in co-operation with Raja Iswar Chandra Sinha of Paikpara, and a Bengali translation of Sri Harsha's *Ratnabali* (by Pundit Ramnarayan) was performed here in July, 1858. Keshab Ganguli, an actor of repute and a friend of Michael Madhusudan Dutta, was the Master, or Dramatic Director. The play was a great success, and on its third night was attended (by invitation) by a cosmopolitan gathering of Bengalees, Europeans, Mohamedans, Jews, etc., to see the first successful Bengali play undertaken by a group of rich, cultured and influential men. The Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Frederic Halliday, several Judges of the High Court, Magistrates and similar highly placed people were also present. Michael Dutt and his friend Gourdas Basak attended these performances, and declared the fact that so much money and energy was spent on a trash drama, like, *Ratnabali*. Michael was out on his mettle, and in two weeks he wrote *Sarmistha*, creating a new type on the lines of Shakespeare and rejecting the

old Sanskrit models. This was produced at the "Belgachia Theatre" on the 3rd September, 1859, with Keshub Ganguli as 'Madhabya', before a representative gathering of Indians and Europeans.

Michael followed this up by writing *Padmabati*, which was produced by the "Bengal Amateur Theatrical Co.," at Burtola (246, Upper Chitpore Road) on the 14th September, 1867, and again at the house of Panchkori Mitra (son of Joy Chandra Mitra) at 311, Upper Chitpore Road. A great demand for original dramas in Bengali had arisen, and Pundit Ramnarayan wrote *Naba Natak* and Maharaja Jotindra Mohan himself wrote playlets, such as, *Bujhley-ki-na*?, *Ubhoy Sankat*, etc., which were performed at his "Belgachia Theatre."

TAGORE FAMILIES

In fact, at this time the Tagore families of Jorasanko and Pathuriaghata, as well as the Sovabazar Raj family, were all bent enthusiastically on the cultivation of the Dramatic Art, and besides the "Belgachia Theatre," two other clubs, called the "Pathuriaghata Banga Natyalaya" and the "Sovabazar Private Theatrical Society" had also been established. Plays were being written by Pundit Ramnarayan, Michael Dutt and others while Raja Sourindra Mohan had organised a concert-party to contribute to the musical side. Michael's *Krishnakumari* was next written and produced in 1867, in which Biharilal Chatterjee, who was known later as actor, writer and promoter of the "Bengal Theatre", appeared as 'Bhim-singha', Girish Ghosh and Ardhendu Sekhar Mustaffi, the pioneers of the Public Stage in Calcutta, were still hovering in the back-ground as spectators.

BOWBAZAR THEATRE

As already stated, admission to these performances was by distribution of cards among a restricted circle,

which created much heart-burning among those unable to obtain admission, and led to a curious result. Two gentlemen of Bowbazar, Chunilal Bose and Baladev Dhar, who had previously acted in *Malabikagnimitra*, produced at the "Pathuriaghata Theatre," were unable to get in at some later production for want of accommodation, so that their long journey from Bowbazar to Pathuriaghata went for nothing. This annoyed them and they determined to start a Theatre of their own in Bowbazar. They obtained the services of Manomohan Basu, a reputed poet, who wrote a drama (*Ram-Abhisek*) for them. Chunilal's maternal uncle, Gobindo Sircar, gave up his courtyard, and his brother, Gopal Sircar, his spacious drawing-room for holding rehearsals, and a stage was set up at No. 3, Gobinda Sircar Lane, no expense being stinted to make it attractive. *Ram-Abhisek* was performed in 1868, followed by Manomohan Basu's *Sati Natak* with great success. Many distinguished Europeans and Indians attended as spectators, among whom may be named the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Raja Digambar Mitra, Chhatu Babu, W. C. Bonnerjee, Chandra Madhab Ghosh, Hem Chandra Banerjee, etc.

In 1874, Manomohan Babu's tragedy, *Harishchandra* was played, but only for a short time owing to several domestic mishaps in the families of the promoters, which brought their activities to an end.

BAGHBAZAR AMATEUR THEATRE

It was exactly a similar reason, *viz.*, being unable to obtain admission to the performances at the Tagore's Theatre, which led Girish Ghosh to establish the "Baghbazar Amateur Theatre," of which he was the life and soul, and with which Ardhendu Mustafi was also connected. They first staged

Dinabandhu Mitra's *Sadhabar Ekadasi* at the house of Pran Krishna Haldar, followed up by Dinabandhu's *Lilabati* at the 'house of Rajendra Nath Pal (1871). Girish Ghosh appeared in this as 'Lalit' and Ardhendu in the dual roles of 'Harabilas' and 'Jhee'. The accompanying concert was led by Rajen Neogi and the 'dhol' was played by Rai Baikuntha Nath Bose Bahadur.

FIRST PUBLIC STAGE

An insistent and growing demand was arising at this time for a Bengali Public Theatre. People were complaining about the casual nature of these amateur performances, and the limited facilities for admission to them. The amateur activities of various different groups, ranging from college students to wealthy and influential people, which had lasted for nearly half a century, were gradually coming to an end, and the first beginnings of a permanent Public Stage were being made. The credit for laying its foundations belongs to the group of enthusiastic young men of North Calcutta (Baghbazar) consisting of Girish Ghosh, Ardhendu Mustaffi, Matilal Sur, Nagendra Nath Banerjee and others.

NATIONAL THEATRE

The performance of *Lilabati* had been sensationally successful, and promoters found themselves unable to accommodate the rush of spectators to their show for want of space. It was, therefore, proposed to convert it to a Public Stage, named the "National Theatre", funds being raised by the sale for tickets of admission. The only dissentient voice was that of Girish Ghosh, who was against such an ambitious project when they had no funds to start with, but as others were determined to go on, he stood aloof. The promoters rented the outer courtyard of the house of Madhusudan Sanyal in Chitpore Road for the modest sum of Rs. 40

per month, and here a stage was erected and scenes painted under the direction of Dharmadas Sur, who was for many years the director of the technical side of stage productions.

FIRST PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

Dinabandhu's *Nil Darpan* was selected as the first piece to be produced and rehearsals were started. The first performance was given on the 7th December, 1872, and proved an immense success. In the cast Ardhendu Mustaffi appeared in four different roles, viz., 'Mr. Wood', 'Golok Bose', 'Sabitri' and a *ryot*; Matilal Sur in the dual roles of 'Torap' and 'Rai Charan'; Nagen Banerjee as 'Nabin Madhab'; Amritalal Mukherji (Bel Babu) as 'Khetramoni'; Abinash Kar as 'Mr. Rogue'; Mahendra Bose as 'Padi Mairani' and Amritalal Bose as 'Sairindhri'.

The performance of *Nil Darpan* was repeated on the 21st December; Dinabandhu's *Jamai Barik* being performed once in the meantime. Thereafter, three of Dinabandhu's plays were put on, viz., *Sadhabar Ekadasi*, *Nabin Tapaswini* and *Lilabati*. The "National Theatre" continued giving performances regularly with two shows a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays till March, 1873, when internal dissensions among its promoters brought about a pause. This closed the first chapter in the life of the Bengali Public Theatre in Calcutta.

A HISTORY OF TROUBLES

The next period of 10 to 15 years is a history of splits and dissensions, of wonderful successes and woeful troubles, and it is impossible to give here a connected history, so I shall content myself with a few outstanding facts. The "National Theatre" was split up into two parties, one with the original name and the other calling itself the "Hindu National Theatre". Both of them continued giving occa-

sional performances in Calcutta, leasing the Town Hall, the "Opera House" in Lindsay Street and "Lewis Theatre Royal" in the *Maidan*, as necessity arose for the purpose. They also went out on tour, visiting various mofussil towns not only in Bengal, but even so far afield as Delhi, Lahore, Agra, Lucknow, etc. The plays produced were mostly from the pen of Dinabandhu Mitra, Monomohan Basu, etc., while another new sun had by this time appeared on the literary horizon of Bengal, *viz.*, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, several of whose novels were dramatised and played: *Durgesh Nandini*, *Bishabriksha*, *Mrinalini* and *Kapalkundala*.

PERMANENT HOME

The "Hindu National Theatre" changed its name in 1873 to the "Great National" and after a time the two rival companies were again fused together. In the same year a wooden pavilion was built on the side of the present "Minerva Theatre" in Beadon Street and this was the first permanent home of the Bengali Theatre. It underwent many vicissitudes and passed through many hands during the succeeding years. In 1883, the whim of a wealthy young man, named Gurmukh Roy, made him take up the theatrical business, in which another wealthy man, named Protap Chand Johuri, had already made money. A lease was obtained of the land at No. 68, Beadon Street* from Preo

*It was here that successively the "Emerald Theatre", financed by Protap Chand Johuri and later by the millionaire Gopal Lal Seal and under the direction of Girish Ghosh; the "Classic Theatre", run by Amarendra Nath Dutt from 1897 to 1906; the "Kohinoor" and lastly the "Monomohan Theatre" established by Monomohan Pande after he broke away from the "Minerva Theatre" ran their course. It was on the boards of the last named Theatre (Monomohan) that *ex*-Professor Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, M. A., dazzled the theatre-goers of Calcutta with his interpretation of the character of 'Rama' in the play *Seeta* produced by him (in 1924-25).

Mitra (son of Kirti Mitra) and the "Star Theatre" was established there. The prime mover in this venture was Girish Ghosh and with him were associated Amritalal Bose, Amritalal Mitra, Dasu Charan Neogi and Hariprosad Bose, who later purchased the Theatre, when the financier got tired of it and gave up the business. They carried on there upto 1887, and then removed to their new building at ~~the~~ corner of Cornwallis Street and Grey Street where it still stands.

"BENGAL" AND "MINERVA" THEATRES

The "Bengal Theatre" was started in 1873 by Sarat Chandra Ghosh, a grandson of Chhatu Babu, helped by Bihari Lal Chatterjee, and though Sarat died a short time after, the business was carried on by Bihari Lal till his death in 1901. It may be mentioned that Albert Edward, Duke of Clarence, (elder brother of King George V) was entertained at this Theatre during his visit to Calcutta in 1890, and the Theatre, thereafter, was named "Royal Bengal Theatre" in honour of the occasion.

The "Minerva Theatre" was established in 1893 and after passing through many tribulations and various hands, *viz.*, Chunilal Deb, Amarendra Dutt, Monomohan Pande, Mahendra Mitra, etc., it was finally taken up by Upendra Kumar Mitra in 1915. The entire building was accidentally destroyed by fire in 1922 but was rebuilt and started again in 1925.

LATER YEARS

The story of the later years is too modern to find a place in a historical survey. The "Star" and the "Minerva" held practically undisputed sway for more than 30 years, and a host of smaller ventures sprang up and passed away in

the recent years, or continues a precarious existence. Only two of them need be mentioned here. In 1923 a group of influential people banded together and started the "Art Theatre Ltd." on the boards of the "Star Theatre", under the management of Aparesh Mukerjee, himself a dramatist and actor of some repute. Their first (mythological) play *Karnarjun* was a tremendous success and ran continuously for over a year, to be followed by other successes. They were the first to put on the stage a play by poet Rabindranath Tagore, viz., *Chirakumar Sabha*. The group of actors in this venture included some young men, whose names have since become household words among both theatre and cinema-goers, such as, Ahindra Chowdhury, Durgadas Banerjee, Radhikananda Mukherjee, Naresh Mitra, etc.

MADAN'S ADVENTURE

The other venture was engineered by Messrs. J. F. Madan and Co., the pioneers of the film show and production business in Bengal, who started the "Bengali Theatrical Co." in a leased building in Cornwallis Street (the present "Sree" Cinema house) under the direction and management of Sisir Bhaduri in 1921, but the venture was exceedingly short-lived. Later, Sisir Bhaduri established his own Theatre,—the "Natya Mandir",—here in 1926 which continued its existence for several years.

SISIR BHADURI

I shall lastly describe two incidents which are unique in the annals of the Bengali Stage. In 1928, while Sisir Bhaduri and his company were performing the play *Seeta* at his "Natya Mandir", an American, named Mr. Elliott, happened to witness the play, which attracted him so much

that when he went back to America he was instrumental in inviting Sisir Kumar to come and perform his plays in New York. Sisir Kumar and his company sailed for America in September, 1939. They received a warm reception, followed by a busy time with rehearsals and presentation of plays at the Broadway Theatre of New York. Unfortunately, however, for their late arrival, at a time when the big theatrical season in New York was over, the party underwent a lot of troubles and financial stringency. In general, however, their plays were favourably received and earned warm praise from many critics. On his return to India, Sisir Bhaduri was accorded a Command Performance by the Viceroy before the Princes in Delhi, which also was a unique honour never paid before to any Bengali actor in the history of the Bengali Stage.

ANTONY "FIRINGY"

A FAMOUS 'KABI-WALLA' OF 18TH CENTURY

Antony's ancestors were probably the Portuguese pirates, who once used to ravage the coastal districts of Bengal, but piracy having died down, Antony was in a dilemma what means of livelihood to adopt. He was at the end of his resources, and was one day sitting in a dejected mood near the *Lal Dighi*. It was the time of the *Dol*, or *Holi*, festival. A party of East India Company sepoy was passing by, celebrating the festival in their own fashion, and threw some coloured water (as is customary in this festival) on a party of up-country *ahirs*, or milk-men. This led to a woody quarrel between the two parties, which gradually waxed fast and furious. When the noise was at its height,

suddenly Antony, who had been a spectator of the quarrel so long, rose up and began roaring out abuses in such a tremendous voice that both the parties were overawed. He had a commanding appearance, being over 6 ft. tall, with an eagle nose and piercing black eyes, and possessed a voice like the proverbial bull. The contending parties beat a hasty retreat from such a master of abuse and vituperation.

It so happened that Durga Charan Babu, scion of a wealthy Calcutta family, had also been sitting dejectedly near the *Lal Dighi*. A nobleman of Murshidabad had challenged him to find a 'Kobi-walla' worthy of being matched against his party, and Durga Charan had so far failed to find a suitable man. Now he rose rejoicing, as he had found a master in the art of vituperation. Antony, taken under the patronage of Durga Charan Babu, defeated the Murshidabad party, and thereafter soon rose to fame as a 'Kobi-walla'.

Kobi and *Tarja* were famous of impromptu versification much in vogue in earlier days. They dealt with devotional or mythological subjects, as well as current events and personalities. They were on most occasions reduced to the level of singing or reciting scurrilous or vituperative verses, made up on the spur of the moment.

